



International Journal OF Engineering Sciences & Management Research

AN ANALYSIS OF DECISION – MAKING POWER AMONG MARRIED WOMEN IN HOUSEHOLD AFFAIRS: A CASE STUDY OF SUALKUCHI ; KAMRUP : ASSAM

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Keywords: Women , decision Making Power, Autonomy , Family Affairs.

ABSTRACT

Decision making process is mainly influenced by the level of knowledge. Women are becoming more autonomous due to enhancement in their education, exposure towards media, awareness , strong understanding with their husband, freedom of movements to some extent. This study aims at understanding the impact of women's autonomy and to analyse the Decision- Making Power among married women of Sualkuchi Block of Kamrup District (Assam). The study revealed an increasing number of cases where the role of women in the family in decision making is primary or at least shared equally with men. In the study 20 questions related to family affairs were listed in the questionnaire to collect data concerning the extent of involvement of women in decision making process.

The involvement of women in decision making was determined on the basis of degree of consultation of husband with their spouses in respect of various family affairs. It is observed that a small portion of the respondent (12.4%) yet believe in dominant role of husbands in making important decisions in family affairs. On the other hand a majority of the respondents (63.5%) answered that their husbands consult with them in taking important decisions in any family matter. Again 54.1% women are consulted by their husbands, some times in family affairs.

INTRODUCTION

With the changing outlook of the society towards women and her role in various activities both inside and outside the family system, the traditional, male chauvinistic role of the father as one to possess the best decision making ability in the family has also undergone drastic transformation. Women , in most part of the world today are no longer compelled to be under the grab of veils and are coming out in the open , shouldering responsibilities in various kinds of decision making and standing at par with men at every stage.

This attitude was a thought completely undreamt of four or five decades back when the men of the family were the sole bread earners and the only person involved in the role of any sort of decision making. The women, on the other hand ,were meant to bear the encumbrance of childbirth and rearing and bringing up children along with the responsibility of looking after the home front and the innumerable needs of the husband. Education has contributed to a great extent in opening up wide spheres of knowledge both for men and women, whereby men's superstitions regarding the women as the weaker sex has encountered a considerable change. Women are no longer confined to the four walls of the house and take active role in the family decision making whether it is finances , or earning money, running the household or making decision about the future of her children, construction / purchase of house , purchase /Sale of land etc.

Another direction to the role of women in the family decision making process has been lent by the role of parenting children. Long years ago, when rearing up children was the duty of the mother, as the male members were busy outside, today , with women taking active part in the professional job, fathers are taking equal interest in the family and molding their child's life.

Now a days there has been an ideological revolution in different theories of human rights and are considered a vital issue. This ideological shift has been accompanied by different efforts to improve the status of women in different societies all over the world. Volunteers , researchers , organization and governments have implemented programs and policies to make the lives of women better in developing countries and their efforts have given fruitful results. Educated women have more control over resources and they play a very important role in economic activities such as family budget preparation, shopping for the family members and other related



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family affairs. They have more awareness about their rights and also have better communication with their husbands. A number of factors contribute to make them more autonomous and more independent in decision making in the family.

One the other-hand less educated women have less access to social services that is the result of inequality in access to education for boys and girls.

In most societies of Asian countries women have a low social status and low level of autonomy, so they have considerably a small role in decision making in the family. Several reports show a positive co-relation between autonomy of women and their role in decision making in the family. Without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace can't be achieved either in a family or in a society and so on.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women represent a great percentage of the global population and in fact in many countries they now exceed more than half of their inhabitants. In addition, due to the educational opportunities and experiences attained by women, they are very important human resources for societies everywhere. The number of participation of women in colleges, universities and different institutions represent a clear picture of discrimination against them. Women participating and putting their talent and education to the service of society is appropriate.

The universal declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right of every person to take part in the government of his or her country. Equal access of man and women to power, decision making and leadership at all levels is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of democracy.

Since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995, the global average for women's participation in national politics has gradually increased from 1.3 percent to almost 17 percent in 2006.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The studies about decision making in family life shows that males usually have power in economic resource, Males often decide how to manage the general financial affairs of the family. This is what determines the framework of many other aspects of family life.

In an investigation about the males who have professional occupation and their wives, the decisions were divided into decisions which were very important and decisions which were considered to be important for both man and woman. A lot of every important decisions such as financial affairs were only made by husbands. Important decisions like children's education were often made by both. But women were just responsible for decisions which were considered to be less important and trivial by both husband and wife for instance, choosing the house interior decorations (Edgel 1980)

The fact that a woman's power to make decisions may differ across topics (Garcia and Oliveira, 1994). It implies that while a woman may have considerable power on some dimensions of the family life, e.g. on decisions regarding child bearing, she may have at the same time very little power to decide what friends or relatives to visit, or how much money she can spend in the next day. Such situations suggest that the study of women's power requires one to identify the different spheres of power and to analyse them separately (Casique, 1999). However, it is also useful to present a more general examination of what or how much power these women do have and additionally, to predict what would be a wife's general level of power based on some individual, family and contextual variables.

Accordingly to Collins' (2002) approach, human beings live in the World created by themselves in which they have the power to influence or even control other mental experience and try to dominate the people who are against them.

Abbot and Wallace (1990) had reported that less important decision making such as food preparation or shopping for children's cloths was upto women.



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Decisions within families can be classified into various types such as instrumental, affective, social, economic and technical. Instrumental decisions are those that focus on issues of money, health, shelter and food for the family members (Epstein Bishop and Baldwin, 1982) Affective decisions deal with choices related to feelings and emotions such as deciding about getting married. Social decisions consist of decisions related to the values, role, and goals of the family (Noller) and Fitzpatrick, 1993). Such decisions include children's education and their future. Economic decisions focus on choices about using and gathering family resources, such as whether an adolescent should get a job and contribute to the family income or buy his or her own car. Technical decisions consists of the smaller decisions that must be made to carry out a large decision. For example if a family decides that one member must stop working in order to go back for an advanced degree, then a series of technical decisions must be made so that the larger decision will materialize (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1993)

Without active participation of women and incorporation of women perspectives at all levels of decision making the goals of equality development and peace can not be achieved (Karl, 1995). Gender equality in democratic governance is very un-even; in most of the countries in the world, women are under –represented in positions of power (Anonymous, 2011), While men make the decisions, implement laws and are responsible for distributing power and resources, the exclusion of women leads to their marginalization. There are various family matters on which men generally take decisions. Women are quite often even not consulted. This is because of the feeling among man that women are incapable of expressing their decisions, due to illiteracy among them (Mumtaz,, 1982)

Singh (1992) conducted a study on modernity and decision making in upbringing of the children and the study revealed that 69.5 percent of the respondents of all categories expressed that both husband and wife should take decisions on this matter. No respondent perceived that wife only should be a decision maker in giving education to the children. Malkit (1998) conducted study on decision making power among women, related to social obligations, which include decisions regarding age at marriage, mate selection, dowry, expenditure on marriage and education of children also showed relatively high role of women.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to examine the role of women in decision making in the family. The study will focus on the type of treatment given by the men folk to the women folk.

The study is undertaken with the following objectives :

- 1) To examine the involvement of women in decision making process in the family.
- 2) To assess women's control on their fertility.
- 3) To evaluate the level of decision making process among women in the matters concerning their children.
- 4) To observe women's empowerment through their decision making power.
- 5) To provide suggestions regarding women's decision making process.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study is based on primary data. The data were collected during the month of July and October, 2014 from a sample of 1000 married women in Kamrup district of Assam.

Multistage sampling procedure was used for collection of data. Data were collected through the technique of direct personal investigation by using self made questionnaire consisting of 35 questions. The method helped to know the attitudes of the sampled women towards their awareness about their rights and responsibilities.

In studying the role of women in decision making in the family 20 selected points related to family affairs were considered and responses were noted on three aspects viz often, sometimes and never.

Each item of investigation was analysed into frequency distribution wherefrom the percentages were worked out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The extent of involvement of married women in decision making in the family in various family affairs has been shown in table -1. The involvement of percentage of married women is calculated on the basis of degree of consultation of husbands with their wives (respondents) in respect of various family affairs as listed in Table -1.

The result indicating the degree of consultation between the respondents and their husbands in various family affairs, have been tabulated under three heads (viz often , sometimes and never) according to the frequency distribution of the opinion of the respondents. The values indicating the range of 'Often' category consultation between the respondents and their husbands in decision making in various family affairs varied from 32.5% to 66.0%. Highest percentage of involvement (66%) of women is found in case of selection of son in law and daughter in law. Involvement of women in decision making in case of family planning is found at 65.2% whereas the involvement of women in decision making is found to be 65.0% in case of buying land or any other valuable property. Women decision making in affairs related to perusing higher education of respondent after marriage is found to be 32.5%. The over all involvement of women in decision making under 'often' category is found to be 58%. Under the category of 'sometimes' consultation between respondents and their husbands ranges from 19.5% to 41.3%. Under this category the involvement of women in decision making is found 19.5% in case of family planning . 41.3% women involved in decision making in case of perusing higher studies after their marriages.

On over all basis, the consultation with women to take decision in family affairs under 'sometimes' category is found to be 34%.

The range of values under 'Never' category of consultation between respondents and their husbands regarding various family affairs varies from 10.0% to 26.2%. Over all average percentage of involvement women under this category is 14.

From the study it is observed that women played an active role as decision makers in various family affairs.

Majority of the women respondents (63.5%) believe that their husbands consult with them in taking important decisions in any family affair. Only a small portion of the respondents (12.4%) yet believe in dominant role of husbands in making important decisions in family affairs and they do not have the courage , confidence or capability to do most of it all alone.

Table -1:
Involvement of Percentage of women in decision making in various family affairs:

Sl. No.	Family affairs	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	Education of Children (son)	56.0	31.0	13.0
	Education of Children (Daughter)	54.5	35.4	10.1
2.	Career of children	60.4	21.6	18.0
3.	Family planning	65.2	19.5	15.3
4.	Perusing higher education after marriage	32.5	41.3	26.2
5.	Control of day to day expenditure	53.0	30.4	16.6
6.	Monthly family budget	54.3	32.2	13.5
7.	Saving of money	52.0	36.5	11.5
8.	Buying land or any other valuable property	65.0	25.0	10.0
9.	Construction or purchase of house	47.0	41.0	12.0
10.	Repair or renovation of residential house	58.4	32.0	9.6
11.	Medical treatment of son and daughter	62.0	25.7	12.3
12.	Selection of son in law and daughter in law	66.0	23.5	10.5
13.	Expenditure on marriage of son and daughter	51.6	34.2	14.2
14.	Dowry for daughters	49.7	40.3	10.0
15.	Family's food menu	54.0	28.5	17.5
16.	Weightage about their choice	48.5	29.0	22.5

17.	Utilization of their earnings	60.0	27.6	12.4
18.	Going on a trip	61.0	20.9	18.1
19.	House decoration	54.5	29.5	16.0
20.	Buying an automobile	47.3	36.4	16.3

[Size of the sample selected = 1000]

Table – 2:
Believing in male superiority in making important decision :

Response	Table	Percentage
To some extent	241	24.1
To great extent	124	12.4
Not at all	635	63.5

[Number of respondents = 1000]

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Women play significant decision making role in educational ,social and development aspects of the family leaving comparatively less participation in perusing higher education of respondents after their marriages. They have played a significant role in selection of son in law and daughter in law (66%) following by family planning (65.2%) and buying land and any other valuable property (65%). It is observed that educational qualification of women helps to play significant role in family decision making. Analysis of data also shows that a large percentage of women agreed that they are satisfied with their position in the family regarding decision making in various family affairs.

Suggestions

- 1) Education plays an important role in every body's life and also in the family or in a society. Therefore, women should be well qualified to understand and to tackle each and every situation.
- 2) In order to increase women's involvement in family decisions , one has to prepare the ground for changing attitude and simultaneous acceptance of both men and women in the society .This measure requires some retrospections in socializing process of boys and girls in family.
- 3) Women autonomy should be higher to increase their role in decision making in the family regarding various family affairs.
- 4) Women should have a co-operative mind . She should try to co-operate with other family members in every step of life.
- 5) Husband and other family members should also have to give the proper importance and respect to the women. She should get her status in the family.

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