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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### WOMEN'S INTRA-HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING POWER IN JHARKHAND STATE, INDIA

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#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study is carried out in order to see the factors associated with women's intra-household decision making power in a newly formed state, Jharkhand where most of the women are not only suppressed and dominated by their male counterparts but also are the bottom of educational level. A comparison is done to see the exact position of the women in Jharkhand state with respect to India. The study also argues whether women decision making power is related with their educational level, employment, income and other socioeconomic variables.

**Aim:** The three objectives of the paper is i) to see the extent of women autonomy in household decision making (ii) to find out the factors responsible for women household decision making, and (iii) to carry out a comparative study of Jharkhand state with respect to rest of the India.

**Materials and Methods:** The data for this study is taken from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) 2005-06. These data are considered only from the married women falling under the age groups of 15-49. The decisions whether taken alone or jointly with others related to (i) own health care (ii) large household purchase (iii) say on husband's earning and (iv) visit to family or relatives, are considered for the analysis. Women individual characteristics and other socio-economic factors are also taken in this study.

**Results:** It is found that the relationship between independent characteristics and their ability to influence decision within household depend on the nature of decision under consideration. The result shows a significant association of marital duration and family pattern irrespective of all decisions in Jharkhand state as well as in India, indicating the indirect effect of seniority in marital life. The significant relation of education or earning position with that of intra-household decision is only seen in India and not in Jharkhand, signifying the lack of awareness or low status of the women in the family.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Women's intra-household decision making is an important aspect not only in terms of gender equity but also it can bridge a communication with the partners and make the family happy. The process by which resource allocation is decided by the members of the family is intra-household decision. In developing countries, women play a vital role to the welfare of the family. They are basically viewed as the potential mothers and home makers (Sultana, 2011). Therefore, decision making power of women within the family has been looked upon as one of the important factors which may affect on well-being of the family (Safilios, 1983). It has been noted that women's active participation at all levels of decision making is important in order to achieve equality and peace in family as well as in the country (Mahmuda and Yoshihito, 2008). Now the question comes why intra-household decision is important? Household decision affects many choices with important

consequences including the distribution of income, allocation of resources, purchase of goods, fertility decision etc. If there is gender inequality in household decision, then this affects the well being of the family members especially for women and children. Decision making power is also important because many decisions that affect the happiness of the individual are made within families. In India, majority of the women are housewives and considered responsible for the up-keep of the house. Thus they expect an extensive participation in housing activities as they can perceive better where to spend or allocate the resources to run a family smoothly. In spite of these facts, the importance of women decision making power in the third world countries is limited to some extent (Sultana, 2010). In a patriarchal society, as exists in large parts of India, men are placed in an advantageous position than women and they have greater power and authority in household decision making simply by virtue of being men and therefore 'head' of the family (Schuler *et al.*, 1996). The family lineage and living arrangement, inheritance and succession practices accelerate to neglect women. Women's position in the society is very much related with the socio-economic condition in one hand and socio-religious and cultural context on the other. For example,

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decisions about the large household purchase mean to knock into economic decision making or participation in decisions about visit to relatives/friends is expected to be more culture specific: this type of decision making is less likely to involve women in cultures where women's freedom of movement is restricted and where their interaction with natal family members is closely monitored by husbands and in-laws. There seem to be different factors which may enhance women's positive attitude towards decision making. Literature suggests that education enables women to assume more women's autonomy or power both in traditional and gender stratified family setting and in more egalitarian ones, giving them greater control over their own lives and a stronger voice in matters affecting themselves and their families (Gulati, 2002, Jejeebhoy, 1995). Higher education has a direct relation with that of household decision as suggested by Acharya (2006).

It is suggested that women autonomy increases both for earned and unearned employed women but the impact of earned income may be larger than non-earned income in women's autonomy (Anderson and Eswaran 2005, Acharya *et al.*, 2010). Evidences from the developing countries also show that women's age and family structure are the strongest determinants of women's authority in decision making (Sathar and Shahnaz 2000). Older women and women in nuclear households are more likely than other women to participate in family decisions. Gender equity gives women both increased decision making authority and more modern reproductive outcomes (Morgan and Niraula 1995). As India shows a regional variation in terms of development factors, therefore, the influence of the socio-economic and cultural factors like education, employment pattern might not show equal impact on women's household decision making authority. In more conservative societies, women tend to be ignored in this process and their input begins only after the major decisions have been taken. All these perceptions make most of the Indian women marginal, poor and shaky. Considering all this, women's household decision making ability in Jharkhand state so far is scarce, especially when the state is backward in development aspect as well as holding strong and rigid patriarchal cultural pattern, the present study aims to see:

- the extent of women participation in household decision making
- to find out the factors responsible for women household decision making, and
- to carry out a comparative study of Jharkhand state with respect to rest of India.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data sets for this study is taken from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) conducted by the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS 2000), Mumbai, in 2006-07. The survey is the outcome of the collaborative efforts of many organizations. The International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) was designated as the nodal agency for this project by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, New Delhi. The NFHS-3 sample covers the Indian population of ever-married women in the age group of 15-49 years, residing in 29 states. The survey collected data at

household and individual level covering the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the households. The present study considered here the married women only. For Jharkhand state the sample size is 2294 and the rest 28 states represent India taken for comparison where the sample size is 85630. This study examines the factors that might affect women's decision making power at the household level. For the analysis both dependent and independent variables are considered.

The dependent variables are the items of decisions. It is related to (i) her own health care (ii) household large purchase (iii) visit to family/relatives (iv) say on husband's earning. The decision relating to the above mentioned matters whether taken (a) alone, or (b) jointly with husband, or (c) jointly with others, or (d) husband only, or (e) others only, are clubbed into two groups. The main focus of the study is to see involvement of the women in the said decision and then to see the factors leading in the involvement in decision. Therefore the grouping is considered as (i) involvement of women whether alone or jointly with husband or others and (ii) no involvement in the decision. Thus the responses are either yes or no according to decision. The independent factors taken for the analysis are educational level categorized as, i) no education, ii) primary iii) secondary, and iv) higher. The other independent variables considered here are the work details of the women. It is assuming that type of work or earning might affect women's say in household decision. The variables are, i) works for herself or others, ii) work seasonal/occasional or all year iii) work paid or not paid. It is expected that the women with paid earner may have greater say in decision. It is also assumed that family characteristics whether nuclear or joint might have an effect in women's decision making ability. Women's decision making authority is clearly related to the context in which they live assuming that urban women have more roles in decision making power than the women lived in rural setting. The other independent factors that have taken here are the income of the household (measured through wealth index) as poorest, poorer, middle, rich and richest group. It is constructed by the IIPS through some asset holdings or quality of house (whether roof or wall is thatched, mud or brick etc.) and then gave a score to generate an index. Women's seniority is seen here through marital duration with the understanding that greater duration indicates higher age and experience of the women. The other factors taken here are the social grouping like i) Scheduled castes (SC), ii) Scheduled Tribes (ST), iii) Other Backward Classes (OBC), and iv) Other than SC, ST, OBC groups.

Bivariate analysis is done here to see the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study population. Association of decision making with different socio-economic factors is done here through percentage distribution and logistic regression. Categorical binary Logistic regression is carried out to see the significant influence of the independent variables on the level of women's decision making process. For regression analysis women decision making is considered as dependent variable. The decision whether taken alone or with others is considered as '1' and no involvement is considered as '0'. An estimated odd ratio of '1' indicates that the nature of dependent variable is not different from the reference category. Estimated odd ratio >1 indicates that the probability of taking or involving in

household decision is more in this category compared to reference category and if it is  $<1$ , then the case is just reverse. Analysis is done using the statistical software package SPSS (16.0 version) for Windows and the significant level of  $p < 0.01$  and  $0.05$  is considered.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of different dependent and independent variables used in this analysis. The table also compares the proportion of variables with India. The analysis shows a sharp mean difference in education and pattern of working condition. Women education secondary and higher is only 29% in Jharkhand which is much lower than India (46%). It is found that women's regular labor force participation is very poor in Jharkhand (27%) in comparison to India (63%). Proportion of paid earner is only 62% in Jharkhand compared to 75% in India. Table 2 shows the percentage distribution of women decision making with different socio-economic factors. Out of those respondents, 62% of currently married women took decision alone or jointly with others on own health care in Jharkhand. This proportion compares with 60.7% on making household large purchase, 78.8% for the say on husband's earning, and 65.8% for visits to friends or relatives. The figures, when compares with India shows that the proportion is higher in household large purchase and say on husband's earning and lower in own health care. The result shows almost same result with respect to mobility.

Participation on the types of decisions gradually increased from non-nuclear to nuclear families, 54.8% to 70.0% on own health care, 47.0% to 75.9% in household large purchase, 72.6% to 85.4% say on husband's earning and 56.0% to 76.8% on visit to relatives. Similar increasing trend is also observed on the type of earnings from not paid to paid earner (51.0%-69.1%, 53.2%-70.4%, 76.3%-85.4% and 60.2%-75.0%) and marital duration (57.1%-69.7%, 50.6%-76.1%, 73.5%-86.8% and 57.8%-78.1%) in the decisions of own health care, large household purchase, husband's earning and visit to relatives respectively. Table 3 shows the results of binary logistic regressions. The model helps us to understand the association between each of the respondent's characteristics and the probability she will have some input on the four decisions. The models also allow us to test the relationship for statistical significance at 1% or 5% level only. First, from the Table 3, it is seen that the relation between education and the decision variables is not statistically significant in case of Jharkhand, but all the decision shows statistically significant (at 1% level) in all India level. This may be a cause that education are not creating enough awareness about gender equality or the educational techniques are not strong enough to change deeply rooted mind sets about gender roles or the male domination is more powerful to suppress or null and void the women's educational awareness in case of Jharkhand. Secondly, women's work and earning status is an important determinant of women's decision making ability within the household. For Jharkhand, women who are paid earner in their working area

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis for Jharkhand and India**

Respondent has a say in decisions relating to:	JHARKHAND					INDIA				
	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Her own health	2294	0.62	0.485	0	1	85563	0.67	0.470	0	1
Large household purchase	2294	0.61	0.489	0	1	85559	0.59	0.492	0	1
Say on husband earnings	2212	0.79	0.409	0	1	83744	0.72	0.450	0	1
Visit to family	2294	0.66	0.474	0	1	85561	0.67	0.471	0	1
Education of respondent										
No education	2293	0.59	0.491	0	1	85627	0.39	0.487	0	1
Primary	2293	0.12	0.314	0	1	85627	0.15	0.361	0	1
Secondary	2293	0.25	0.434	0	1	85627	0.37	0.483	0	1
Higher	2293	0.04	0.204	0	1	85627	0.09	0.284	0	1
Details of work										
Works for herself	1189	0.13	0.337	0	1	34063	0.17	0.372	0	1
Works for others	1189	0.87	0.337	0	1	34063	0.82	0.381	0	1
Work seasonal/occasional	1188	0.73	0.443	0	1	34050	0.37	0.484	0	1
Work all year	1188	0.27	0.443	0	1	34050	0.63	0.484	0	1
Type of earnings										
Not paid	1189	0.38	0.487	0	1	34066	0.25	0.430	0	1
Paid cash/kind/both	1189	0.62	0.487	0	1	34066	0.75	0.430	0	1
Family characteristics										
Non-Nuclear	2294	0.53	0.499	0	1	85630	0.44	0.497	0	1
Marital duration	2294	13.48	8.858	0	40	85630	14.00	8.86	0	43
Rural residence	2294	0.65	0.477	0	1	85630	0.56	0.496	0	1
Family economic position										
Poorest	2294	0.43	0.496	0	1	85630	0.12	0.333	0	1
Poorer	2294	0.15	0.354	0	1	85630	0.15	0.360	0	1
Middle	2294	0.12	0.324	0	1	85630	0.19	0.393	0	1
Rich	2294	0.14	0.349	0	1	85630	0.24	0.424	0	1
Richest	2294	0.16	0.366	0	1	85630	0.30	0.456	0	1
Ethnicity										
Scheduled Caste	2290	0.11	0.314	0	1	82261	0.18	0.380	0	1
Scheduled Tribe	2290	0.21	0.410	0	1	82261	0.13	0.334	0	1
Other Backward Classes	2290	0.48	0.500	0	1	82261	0.34	0.475	0	1
None of them	2290	0.19	0.394	0	1	82261	0.35	0.477	0	1

Table 2. Percentage distributions of background characteristics with respect to decision making in Jharkhand and India

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTIC	JHARKHAND					INDIA				
	N	WOMEN SAY IN DECISION RELATING TO				N	WOMEN SAY IN DECISION RELATING TO			
		Own health care	Large HH purchase	Husband earning	Visit to relative		Own health care	Large HH purchase	Husband earning	Visit to relative
Education of respondent										
No education	1362	61.5	63.2	78.9	68.1	32719	62.2	54.8	69.0	61.9
Primary	255	58.0	52.9	74.7	60.4	13282	66.1	57.6	70.4	66.1
Secondary	575	64.2	57.0	79.0	62.3	31879	69.4	60.1	72.6	69.1
Higher	100	68.0	67.0	87.5	70.0	7680	79.9	71.5	80.0	78.9
Details of work										
Works for herself	155	70.3	72.9	87.5	74.2	5685	75.7	68.3	80.2	75.9
Works for others	1034	60.9	62.4	81.1	68.6	28352	66.5	60.3	73.0	67.9
Work seasonal/occasional	869	58.9	59.3	79.2	64.8	12329	74.0	56.0	72.7	65.1
Work all year	319	70.8	75.9	89.4	81.5	21694	70.3	64.8	75.1	71.6
Type of earnings										
Not paid	457	51.0	53.2	76.3	60.2	8194	59.9	51.5	67.3	60.9
Paid cash/kind/both	732	69.1	70.4	85.4	75.0	25845	70.6	64.8	76.4	71.9
Family characteristics										
Non-Nuclear	1209	54.8	47.0	72.6	56.0	37700	62.3	49.3	65.6	59.1
Nuclear	1085	70.0	75.9	85.4	76.8	47863	70.9	66.1	76.2	72.8
Marital duration										
<=15	1390	57.1	50.6	73.5	57.8	49812	64.1	53.4	68.3	62.1
>15	904	69.7	76.1	86.8	78.1	35751	71.3	66.1	76.1	73.2
Residence										
Rural	1494	59.4	57.9	77.5	64.9	48010	62.9	53.2	68.8	61.7
Urban	800	67.0	65.9	81.2	67.6	37553	72.5	65.7	75.1	73.2
Family economic position										
Poorest	994	59.8	61.1	77.6	65.9	10132	59.3	52.7	69.5	58.1
Poorer	336	56.8	57.1	76.9	65.8	13072	60.9	53.0	67.7	60.4
Middle	273	63.4	56.4	78.8	64.1	16512	64.5	55.8	69.5	63.6
Rich	325	66.2	62.2	79.3	61.5	20272	68.5	59.4	71.1	68.1
Richest	366	68.3	64.8	83.2	70.8	25575	73.8	65.3	76.1	74.5
Ethnicity										
Scheduled Caste	254	72.0	64.2	78.5	67.3	14532	66.0	56.8	71.2	64.3
Scheduled Tribe	490	62.2	66.5	80.0	70.8	10313	72.6	67.6	79.3	76.5
Other Backward Classes	1105	60.3	58.1	77.2	63.8	27957	63.6	56.1	69.8	63.4
None of them	440	61.1	59.1	82.2	64.5	29054	69.9	59.6	71.7	68.3
Overall	2294	62.0	60.7	78.8	65.8	85563	67.1	58.7	71.6	66.8

Table 3. Categorical binary logistic regression effects of independent variables on the decision in Jharkhand and India

Independent variables	Jharkhand				India			
	WOMEN SAY IN DECISION RELATING TO				WOMEN SAY IN DECISION RELATING TO			
	HH large purchase	Husband earning	Own health	Visit to relative	HH large purchase	Husband earning	Own health	Visit to relative
<b>Education of respondent</b>								
No education <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	0.626*	0.724	0.734	0.859	1.231	1.219**	1.173**	1.243**
Secondary	0.843	1.094	1.093	0.850	1.409**	1.397**	1.433**	1.423**
Higher	3.495	1.8E+08	1.845	4.034	2.400**	1.845**	2.287**	2.205**
<b>Work Status and earnings</b>								
Works for others <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Works for herself	1.463	1.532	1.343	1.179	1.173**	1.279**	1.265**	1.203**
Works seasonally/occasional <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Work all year	1.553*	1.664*	1.287	1.916**	1.141**	0.937*	1.033	1.040
Work but not paid <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Work Paid earner	1.488*	1.368	1.733**	1.545**	1.403**	1.351**	1.312**	1.365**
<b>Family characteristics</b>								
Nuclear <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Non-Nuclear	0.361**	0.538**	0.600**	0.478**	0.559**	0.675**	0.715**	0.591**
Marital duration								
<= 15 year <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
> 15 year	2.270**	2.436**	1.438*	1.918**	1.700**	1.457**	1.482**	1.614**
<b>Family economic position</b>								
Poorest <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Poorer	1.250	1.156	0.909	1.202	1.077*	0.924*	1.095*	1.208**
Middle	0.817	1.017	1.098	0.776	1.144**	0.991	1.297**	1.334**
Rich	0.986	1.004	1.732	0.725	1.129*	1.016	1.323**	1.439**
Richest	1.179	1.873	2.669	1.075	1.178**	1.114	1.388**	1.785**
<b>Ethnicity</b>								
Scheduled Caste <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Scheduled Tribe	0.995	0.785	0.727	1.372	1.641**	1.490**	1.369**	1.821**
Other Backward Classes	0.687	0.611	0.669	0.884	0.919*	0.933	0.848**	0.879**
None of them	0.420*	0.908	0.456*	0.676	1.034	0.974	1.083*	1.005
<b>Residence</b>								
Rural <sup>(R)</sup>	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Urban	1.352	0.581	0.707	0.984	1.615**	1.342**	0.504**	1.438**
N	1186	1143	1186	1186	32803	31895	32803	32803

\*\* significant at 1% level, \* Significant at 5% level, <sup>(R)</sup>= Reference category

have a significant higher probability of having some say in household large purchase, own health care and visit to relatives in comparison to the women of non paid worker. India also shows a higher probability of having some say among the women who are paid earners in all four decisions. The odd ratios are higher in comparison to not paid worker. Similarly, regular employed women have a significant higher probability on say to visit to relatives (significant at 1% level) or household purchase or say on husband's earnings (significant at 5% level) compared to occasional/ seasonal employed women. It indicates that regular employed women get a priority in the involvement in decision relating to economy in Jharkhand. Third, family characteristics like type of family play a major role in making decisions. It is found from the analysis that non nuclear families have a significant lower probability of say in all the four decisions (significant at 1% level) against nuclear families in case of Jharkhand. It is likely that in nuclear families women might be the sole decision maker with their husband as there was no senior in-laws member in the family and thus shows a higher probability of decision making authority. The result also shows that marital duration is positively associated with the probability of having some say in all the decisions in Jharkhand. India also indicates the positive inclination of experience through age.

Fourth, household economic position shows a weak determinant of women's involvement in decision making in Jharkhand and indicates that women's decision making power is not related with the household's wealth. But considering India the analysis shows that the odds are significantly higher than the poorest (reference) category in the decision of household large purchase or own health care or visit to relatives. Looking at the ethnicity variables, the result is spurious and does not indicate any clear representation. Residential difference, though have a higher probability in household large purchase in urban areas, does not show any significance compared to rural women in Jharkhand, whereas significant higher odds are seen in the decisions (except own health care) in national level.

## DISCUSSION

The main focus of the paper is to see the influence of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors that are associated with women's intra-household decision making ability. It is observed that some factors affect the women ability to take part in the household decision making process. For a happy family, both husband and wife's equal participation in family decision making is necessary, although the result shows that in Jharkhand women generally possess low decision making power. The study shows that women decision making varies significantly according to socio-economic and cultural background. In support of it, a number of scholars believe that education and employment situation are the two most important factors to aware women which can minimize gender inequality and helps to take part in the decision. But the surprising feature is that, in Jharkhand, education does not create any significant role in enhancing women decision making ability which differs with the work of Acharya (2008), but considering India, the result corroborates with the author. Employment, another important area and which is supposed to

increase women decisions making power, is found that the paid earner women are significantly associated with women's intra-household decision. This indicate that women belongs to paid category are more likely to participate in decision making than non paid group. The reasons might be that in most of the family men control the household's cash and it is difficult for the non paid earner women to pay for their own purpose where money is concerned. Therefore, paid employed women are highly correlated with all the items of household decisions. Marital duration play a significant positive role to make or involve in all the decisions in Jharkhand as well as in India which indicates that as women get older, they gain autonomy in household decision making. A newly married daughter-in-law has less decision making power in the household and she is expected to perform household duties under the supervision of her mother-in-law who is the primary decision maker. These possibilities are also reflected in our result where women coming from the non-nuclear families are significantly lower participator in decision making. Residence pattern does not create any differentiation in Jharkhand, whereas in India, rural women are significantly less likely to take part in decision making than urban women. In end, it can be said that improvement in women education and employment situation is not sufficient to enhance decision making ability in Jharkhand state; rather seniority gets more priority in the household decisions. Therefore, if education and employment condition aims to promote the autonomy of women to build up women's capacity or involvement to control resources, then a more comprehensive strategy must be sought for gender equity at the policy level that could raise women's gender consciousness and provide support for challenging traditional norms.

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