

Relationship Between Women's Empowerment and Having 'Final Say' in Household Decision Making Among Ijesa Women of South Western Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women refers to giving decision-making power to women in social, economic, and political sphere of life. It is a process of making women aware of socio-psycho-cultural and political injustice that is prevailing in the society against women. Having a greater say in household decisions enables women to influence not only their own psychological and physical wellbeing, but also that of their children. This paper examined the relationship between women's empowerment and having a say or final say in household decision making among Ijesa women of south-western Nigeria. Examining who has a say or final say is important to household quality of life and welfare. A cross-sectional survey design using quantitative technique was employed. A multistage sampling technique involving a random selection of 1,594 ever-married women of childbearing age was carried out. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, bivariate analysis of Chi square, and logistic regression. The findings show that issues relating to number of children to have, the school to send children to, when to buy and sell land, whether or not to use a contraceptive method to avoid getting pregnant, when to have sex, as well as the person to take responsibility for upkeep and rearing of children are mostly jointly decided by husband and wife. The P value of the Chi Square and the Logistic Regression shows that there is significant relationship between women's empowerment and household decisions considered in the study. The study concludes that women who are empowered have final say on the issues under consideration, compared to their counterparts who are not empowered. There is the need therefore for the empowerment of women to achieve better quality of life for household members.

Keywords: Decision- making, Empowerment, Final say, Household

BACKGROUND

Empowerment of women refers to giving decision-making power to women in social, economic, and political sphere of life. It is a process of making women aware of socio-psycho-cultural and political injustice that is prevailing in the society against women. There is a clear regional diversity in women's involvement in decision-making, indicating to some extent the variability in power relations and gender inequality across regions, especially in rural areas [14]. Women's decision-making authority is strongly related to the context in which they live, with urban women having an almost equal say as their husbands in domestic decisions, whereas rural women report that most household matters are predominantly decided by their husbands and other family members [17].

Having a greater say in household decisions enables women to influence not only their own psychological and physical wellbeing, but also that of their children. Women who have a say in decisions pertaining to family planning and household expenditure are associated with better outcomes in terms of health and education [1]. The goals of women's empowerment are to

transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality (family); and enable poor women gain access to and control material and informational resources [2]. Women's status or empowerment has been shown in specific study settings to be a key variable for the decline of infant and child mortality (in Egypt by Kishor [13], for women's use of prenatal care services (in Indonesia by Beegle, Frankenberg, and Thomas [5] for immunization of children (in Egypt by Kishor [13]), for seeking treatment for ill children (in Mali by Castle [6] and for use of modern contraception (in India by Jejeebhoy [10])). In Guatemala, Gleit et al [8] found that married rural women who reported greater household decision-making power used biomedical services during pregnancy more often than those who reported less autonomy.

Till recently, variables such as education and employment were commonly used to capture empowerment and other similar concepts such as women's autonomy and status. However, these variables are only proxies for empowerment [9]. The bulk of the literature focuses on formal education, however, and empowers women by enabling them to read and write and make independent decisions (e.g., by no longer having to rely on others to read the news or medical prescriptions, etc.). Education also increases women's reservation wage, which also acts as an empowering factor. Furthermore, a woman's educational attainment signals her social status and intellect. According to the marriage-matching model [4], educated women are more likely to marry educated men. The more educated a man, the more empowered his wife is likely to be. Through this channel, a more educated woman will be more empowered than a woman with less or no education. In this context, Acharya et al. [1] and Shahnaz and Kizilbash [18] revealed that women who are better educated have a greater say in decision-making. Educated women have more control over resources and they play a very important role in economic activities such as budgeting, family matters and shopping for the family members. Educated women have more awareness about their rights and have better communication with their husbands. While less educated women have less access to adequate infrastructure and social services that is the result of inequality in access to education for boys and girls [3]. Women are getting education and are becoming more aware of their rights, obligations, and freedom etc. Women who are more educated have more empowerment than women with less education or uneducated [19].

Different studies have also defined employment variously as including both paid and unpaid workers [1] or those working or looking for a job [7]. Acharya et al. [1] also find that paid employment is more empowering than unpaid employment. This relates to the earlier theories presented by McElroy and Horney [16] and Manser and Brown [15], which argue that employment acts as a resource that empowers women in the intrahousehold bargaining process. Employment may also enable a woman to interact with the outside world and allow her to exercise autonomy directly or indirectly. Kabeer [11] also argues that the mere possibility of controlling her money is likely to empower a woman. Numerous other variables have been studied or used as controls when identifying the determinants of women's empowerment. Some of these include a woman's age, number of children, the husband's level of education and occupation, family structure (whether joint or nuclear), household wealth, and region [1].

This paper examined the relationship between women's empowerment and having a say or final say in household decision making among the Ijesa of south-western Nigeria. In other words, this paper examined the major household decision maker between the husband and wife among the Ijesa sub ethnic group of the Yoruba's. The paper also examined decisions that are jointly made by both the husband and wife. Examining who has a say or final say is important to household quality of life and welfare.

A cross-sectional survey design using quantitative technique was employed. A multistage sampling technique, which involved purposive selection of four Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Atakumosa West (346), Ilesa-East (448), Ilesa-West (450) and Obokun (350) with the predominance of the Ijesa was used. A random selection of 17 enumeration areas and 1,594 ever- married women of childbearing age was carried out. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on socio-demographic characteristics, fertility decision making, and women empowerment. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and bivariate analysis of Chi square was used to determine the relationship between women’s empowerment and having final say on some household decisions.

FINDINGS

Respondents “having a say” in Specific Household Decision-making

Whether or not a woman “has a say” on specific household decision-making determines the extent of her empowerment. In the survey, information was obtained on whether or not the respondents’ “have a say” on specific decision-making in the household. Table 1 shows majority of the respondents do have a say in decision-making on the issues under consideration. More respondents have a say on the issues of spending family income (60.5 per cent) and disciplining of children (74.4 per cent). The proportions fell on the issue of when to have sex (55.8 per cent) and number of children to have (59.9 per cent). The table clearly indicates that, on the average, respondents have a say on the specific household decision-making, an indication of fairly high level of women’s empowerment in the study area.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents who have a Say on Specific Household Decisions

Characteristics	N	%
Have Say in Spending of Family Income Yes	965	60.5
Have Say in Disciplining of Children Yes	1186	74.4
Have Say on the Number of Children to Have Yes	955	59.9
Have Say on When to Have Sex Yes	889	55.8

Who has the final say on household decisions?

In most instances, the person who has the final say on issues or decisions that affect the household is seen as the superior partner in a family. Table 2 presents result to the question on who has the final say on household decision-making on some issues. The table shows that husbands have overwhelming power (60.9 per cent) in having a final say on household purchases, how to spend spouses’ income (64.1 per cent) and having a final say on whether women should work (39.4 per cent). Majority of the women alluded to the fact that they have the final say on how to spend their own income (56.5 per cent). From literature, women’s final say in decisions regarding day-to-day household purchases was significantly associated with wanting no more children, having a small ideal family size, and ever using modern contraception [20]. However, women who have the final say or those who jointly decide with their husbands can be said to have significant or considerable degree of empowerment. This is so because before the husband and wife jointly take a decision, there must have been spousal communication which itself is a measure of empowerment [12].

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents by who have the Final Say on a Number of Household Decisions

Characteristics	N	%
Has Final Say on Household Purchases		
Self	220	13.9
Husband	964	60.9
Self & Husband	399	25.2
Others	1	0.1
Total	1584	100
Has Final Say on Whether Woman should Work		
Self	407	26.2
Husband	612	39.4
Self & Husband	533	34.3
Others	-	-
Total	1552	100
Has Final Say on How to Spend Spouses Income		
Self	186	11.9
Husband	1001	64.1
Self & Husband	375	24.0
Others	-	-
Total	1562	100
Has Final Say on How to Spend Your Income		
Self	865	56.5
Husband	270	17.6
Self & Husband	396	25.9
Others	-	-
Total	1531	100
Has Final Say on Number of Children to Have		
Self	151	9.8
Husband	576	37.3
Self & Husband	815	52.8
Others	1	0.1
Total	1543	100
Has Final Say on the School to Send Children to		
Self	143	9.3
Husband	568	36.8
Self & Husband	834	54.0
Others	-	-
Total	1545	100
Has Final Say on When to Buy and Sell Land		
Self	186	12.0
Husband	598	38.7
Self & Husband	758	49.1
Others	3	0.2
Total	1545	100
Has Final Say on Whether or Not to Use a Method to Avoid Becoming Pregnant		
Self	272	17.5
Husband	424	27.2
Self & Husband	852	54.8
Others	8	0.5
Total	1556	100
Has Final Say on When to Have Sex		
Self	202	12.9
Husband	608	38.7
Self & Husband	760	48.4
Others	1	0.1
Total	1571	100

Has Final Say on Person to Take Responsibility for Upkeep & Rearing Children		
Self	233	14.9
Husband	413	26.3
Self & Husband	922	58.8
Others	1	0.1
Total	1569	100

On issues relating to number of children to have, the school to send children to, when to buy and sell land, whether to use a contraceptive method to avoid getting pregnant, when to have sex, as well as the person to take responsibility for upkeep and rearing of children are mostly jointly decided by husband and wife. On these issues, Table 2 above revealed that combined decisions by wife and husband have the highest percentage of prevalence. In this regard, the result disclosed that 52.8 percent of the respondents agreed that there is a joint decision by the husband and wife on the number of children to have. Also, 54.0 per cent of the respondents have a final say on the school to send their children to which is jointly decided by the husband and wife, 49.1 per cent jointly decided on having a final say on whether to sell or buy land, 54.8 per cent jointly decided on have a final say on whether or not to use a method to avoid becoming pregnant. Also, 48.4 per cent mutually have a final say on whether to have sex and both self and husband collaboratively have a final say on person to take responsibility for upkeep and rearing children.

Relationship between Women’s Empowerment and Having Final Say in Household Decisions

The Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of the women by selected household decisions with respect to empowerment status. The P value shows that there is significant relationship between women’s empowerment and household decisions considered in the table. With regards to purchases of household items, the P value shows that there is significance difference between women who are empowered and those not empowered with regards to their having final say. The table indicate that about 43 per cent of empowered women have final say on purchases for household items compared with about 21 per cent of women who are not empowered but also have a final say ($P \leq 0.05$). The table also revealed that 62.2 per cent of empowered women have final say on whether women should work which was also more than 52.1 per cent of women who are not empowered but also have a final say on this. Findings revealed that 39.4 per cent and about 86 per cent of women who were empowered have final say on spending of spouse income and women’s income respectively compared to 16.5 per cent and 65.5 per cent of women who are not empowered but have final say on spending spouse income and women’s income respectively.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Women's Empowerments and having Final Say in Household Decisions

Characteristics	% Not Empowered	% Empowered	P. value
Purchases of Household items			
Not have final say	79.8	57.2	0.000
Have final say	20.8	42.8	
Whether women should work			
Not have final say	47.9	37.8	0.002
Have final say	52.1	62.2	
Spending of spouse income			
Not have final say	83.5	60.6	0.000
Have final say	16.5	39.4	
Spending of women's income			
Not have final say	34.5	14.2	0.000
Have final say	65.5	85.8	
Number of children to have			
Not have final say	64.6	32.2	0.000
Have final say	35.4	67.8	
School to send children			
Not have final say	57.8	32.6	0.000
Have final say	42.2	67.4	
When to buy and sell land			
Not have final say	72.5	32.4	0.000
Have final say	27.5	67.6	
Use of family planning			
Not have final say	42.1	24.8	0.000
Have final say	57.9	75.2	
Whether to have sex			
Not have final say	61.5	32.4	0.000
Have final say	38.5	65.8	
Responsibility for children upkeep			
Not have final say	44.2	22.8	0.000
Have final say	55.8	77.2	

On issues relating to number of children to have, 67.8 per cent of women who are empowered have final say on the number of children to have as against 35.4 per cent who are not empowered but have a final say. Results also revealed that majority (67.4 per cent) of empowered women have final say on the school to send their children to as against 42.2 per cent of women who have final say but are not empowered. The table further show that 67.6 per cent of women who are empowered have final say on when to buy and sell land and 75.2 per cent of empowered women have final say on the use of family planning as compared to 27.5 per cent of women who have a final say on when to buy and sell land but are not empowered and 57.9 per cent of women who are not empowered but have a final say on the use of family planning.

Larger percentage (65.8 per cent) of empowered women have final say on whether to have sex with the husband, compared to 38.5 per cent of women not empowered who have a final say on whether to have sex with husband or not. Table 3 also revealed that 77.2 per cent of women who are empowered have final say on the responsibility for their children upkeep, as compared to 55.8 per cent who has a final say but are not empowered. In all the above, more women who are empowered have final say on the issues under consideration, compared to their counterparts who are not empowered. All the decision-making variables considered have significant relationship with women's empowerment.

Effects of Women's Empowerment on the Likelihood of Having Final Say on Household Decision making

Table 4 presents the odds ratio of the logistic regression model showing the likelihood effects of women's empowerment on having final say on household decision making by women. The dependent variable is likelihood of having final say on household decision making, coded 1 if the woman has the final say, and 0 if she does not. The basic assumption that underlines the specification of this logistic regression model is that likelihood of having final say on household decision making depends on women's empowerment. The null hypothesis tested by the model chi-square statistics is that the coefficients for all the terms in the current model except the constant is zero. From Table 4, the model fits perfectly with model chi-square significant at $p < 0.000$, thus implying that the coefficients of the variable in the model are different from zero. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis- that variables in the model all have zero coefficients, and accept the alternatives hypothesis- that variables have coefficients that differ from zero. This means that women's empowerment affects the likelihood of having final say on household decision making. In other words, having final say by women on household decisions depends on women's empowerment. The relationship between the dependent and the independent variables is statistically significant. The table shows that four independent variables are in one way or the other statistically significant with women's empowerment.

As a result of the chi-square model, the null hypothesis that women's empowerment does not affect likelihood of having final say in household decision making is rejected. While the alternative hypothesis, that likelihood of having final say on household decision making is affected by women's empowerment is accepted. From the table, it could be observed that empowered women are about one and half times more likely to have final say on decisions relating to the purchase of household items compared to their counterparts that are not empowered. With regards to spending of spouse income, empowered women are about 1.4 times more likely to have final say on this as compared to those not empowered. On the spending of women's personal income, the table shows that empowered women are about 1.6 times more likely to take final decision on how to spend their money as compared to their not empowered counterparts. It is also noteworthy that this variable is significant with women's empowerment. As far as number of children to have is concerned, empowered women are about two times more likely to have final say compared to women who are not empowered. This is very important because it has to do with household quality of life and wellbeing. In relation to when to buy or sell land, empowered women are about four times more likely to have final say compared to their counterparts that are not empowered. This is an indication of having a say or final say on issues relating to family economy, which is a good signal to family quality of life and wellbeing. This variable is also statistically significant with women's empowerment.

Table 4: Logit Model of Likelihood of Having Final Say on Household Decision making by Women's Empowerment

Characteristics	Odd Ratio	Exp (B)
Purchases of Household items		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	0.452	1.572
Whether women should work		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	-0.060	0.942
Spending of spouse income		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	0.333	1.395
Spending of women's income		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	0.464	1.590*
Number of children to have		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	0.675	1.964*
School to send children		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	-0.465	0.628*
When to buy and sell land		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	1.275	3.579*
Use of family planning		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	-0.152	0.859
Whether to have sex		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	-0.028	0.972
Responsibility for children upkeep		
Not have final say (r)	-	-
Have final say	0.326	1.385

-2 Log likelihood = 1056.178

$R^2 = .202$

Prob = 0.000

Model Chi Square = 175.144

= sig at <0.05

CONCLUSION

This paper has clearly showed the relationship between women's empowerment and having a say or final say in household decision making by women. The paper found that most of the household decisions are jointly made by the husband and wife. Further, it was discovered that empowered women in the study area have final say on issues relating to number of children to have, the school to send children to, when to buy and sell land, whether to use a contraceptive method to avoid getting pregnant, when to have sex, as well as the person to take responsibility for upkeep and rearing of children. The study revealed that there is significant relationship between women's empowerment and household decisions considered in the study. The logistic regression shows that women's empowerment positively influences the ability of women to have a say or final say in household decision making. The study concludes that women who are empowered have final say on the issues under consideration, compared to their counterparts who are not empowered. Women empowerment is therefore a pre-condition to having a say or final say on household decision making. There is the need therefore for the empowerment of women to achieve better quality of life for household

members through making informed decisions by women, since this is important to household quality of life and welfare.

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