

## An Analysis of Decision-Making Power among Married and Unmarried Women

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**ABSTRACT** Decision making process is generally influenced by the level of knowledge. Women are the integral part of family and vital force in the socio-economic progress. The present study is undertaken to analyse the Decision-Making Power among married and unmarried women. Scale regarding 'Decision Making Power among Women' constructed by Jan (2004) was used on 100 women, selected through multi-stage sampling method. The paper reveals that there is no significant differences between married and unmarried women regarding their decision making power. However, highly significant differences are observed, between married and unmarried women, related to their empowerment. Women generally possess low decision making power and are mainly dependent on masculine and/or familial decision making.

### INTRODUCTION

Women play a crucial role in the economic welfare of the family. Women perform different tasks depending on their Socio-economic structure, number of people in the family, the nature of professions they are involved in and many other factors (Reddy and Narayan 1987). Decisions made in home management ranges in importance from major once in a lifetime. For example, choice of a marriage partner is indeed an important decision and not to be taken lightly, but it is only in fairy tales that they live happily ever after (Knoll 1973). In the upper income groups, the type of home and the duties of women may vary greatly in the conservative or traditional home and in the modern home (Megha 1990). The authoritarian character of the traditional joint family entails decision making powers concentrated, in the position of the eldest male members (Rao 1982). Women are traditionally less involved in decision making at all levels. Their important role is not recognised and, therefore, still not accepted in decision-making. The share of women in community decision-making structure is still very low and their participation is mostly stressed by political parties, more as elements of their own publicity and proof of democratisation, than as a real interest and need. For example, only 3 per cent women are members of political parties. They are also less active in professional associations and bodies (Slovenia 1998). 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 cannot be achieved (Karl 1995).

### Review of Literature

Lancaster (1965) conducted study on ten wives who had not attended college. Several women expressed or gave evidence of uncertainty in relation to their decision making. Families are more likely to report satisfactory than unsatisfactory decisions. This may be due to pride to accepting the consequences with good grace, to rationalization of the alternative chosen or to the fact that people frequently make new decisions to offset the unpleasant consequences of the unsatisfactory decision.

According to Mumtaz (1982) there are various family matters on which men generally take decisions. Women are quite often not even consulted. This is because of the feeling among men that women are incapable of expressing their decisions, due to illiteracy among them. It would mean if women are educated they would acquire the capacity to participate in decision making.

Singh (1992) conducted a study on modernity and decision making in upbringing of the children, and the study revealed that 69.5 per cent 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. It

was found that 90.8 per cent of the respondents were in high level of modernity, 74.0 per cent of the respondents in the medium level of modernity and only 20.3 per cent of the respondents were in low level of modernity considered that husband and wife both have to take decisions regarding the education of 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. Dowry was more or less a female domain with 78.3 per cent, women having high role in it, followed by decisions related to age at marriage of son or daughter.

Roth (2001) in his study found that wives tend to under-report their household decision-making power. In couples with both partners educated and in couples in which women work for pay, both partners were significantly more likely to report that both of them participate in the final decisions than was the case in couples without education or in which the wife did not work for pay. Decision-making power of women as measured in this study was significantly related to the household having a plan for what to do in case of a maternal emergency, but was not associated with place of childbirth or with having a postpartum check-up.

Lait and Rehmat (2001) in their study examined whether men's and women's retirement have a differential impact on several aspects of marital life, i.e. power relations (as reflected in decision-making), spousal resources, division of household tasks, and quality of marriage. There was evidence of change in decision-making patterns about spending time and carrying out feminine and general tasks. It was also found that men's retirement has a different impact than women's retirement on decisions about household affairs and performance of feminine tasks.

Marieke (2001) argued in his study that perception of social support were based in part in the structural conditions of individual marital arrangements, specifically household decision of labour and decision making. The study suggested the structural arrangements within marriages likely impact individuals perceptions of social support and that the closer couples come

to equal labour and decision making in the household, the more supported each partner is likely to feel.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is undertaken with following objectives:

- To study the decision making power among women as per their marital status.
- To assess women's control on their fertility.
- To evaluate the level of decision making process among women in the matters concerning their children.
- To observe women's empowerment through their decision making power.

### **Rationale of Study**

Women play a great role in over all development and progress of the nation. But their participation in different fields either directly or indirectly are still behind in many aspects. In most cases, women are considered inferior to men, and their life is restricted within the four walls of the house. For taking any decision, less power is given to women, as they have the right to take decisions regarding various items, as that of the men. So, in order to make women aware about their influence on society, nation and for attaining their respectable status within the family, the present study was undertaken. Rights should be given to women, to make decisions regarding various aspects in the family and society. Thus, the present study is under taken to highlight the areas where women lag behind in their decision making power.

### **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

The study was conducted in 2007, on 100 women in Jammu and Kashmir. Among these women, 50 were married and 50 were unmarried. Among married women, 25 were illiterate and 25 women were literate. Same was the case among unmarried women. The study was based on primary data. Multistage sampling method was used for the study. The tools used for the present study comprised an interview schedule and a scale constructed by Jan (2004), regarding "Decision Making Power among Women." The scale consisted of 43 items on different aspects which were divided into 5 categories i.e., egalitarian,

feminine, masculine, familial and non-specific decision makers. 'Egalitarian' meant decisions jointly by husband and wife. 'Feminine' meant decisions taken by respondents themselves or female members in the family. 'Masculine' meant decisions taken by husband or male members of the family. 'Familial' meant decisions taken by parents, in-laws and/or grand parents in the family. 'Non-specific' meant decisions taken by secondary relations, i.e., uncles, aunts, guardians, etc. The scale was further divided into three categories i.e., Decisions related to children, Decisions related to self-empowerment and Decisions related to fertility. In case of unmarried women, the decision making power in relation to fertility and child-rearing practices were projected as per their perspectives. In this content, the unmarried women were asked who in future will/shall take decisions related to their fertility or children.

The data collected was coded, scored, and analyzed through the software namely SPSS, computing percentages,  $\chi^2$  -value, degrees of freedom, and levels of significance. Levels of significance were obtained at the p-values < 0.01, < 0.05 and >0.05. The p-value of <0.01 was regarded as highly significant. The p-value <0.05 was considered significant, the p-values of >0.05 was calculated as insignificant. The reliability of the scale regarding Decision-Making Power among women was tested for its validity in Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) and was found reliable by 91 percent through reliability test. The least score obtained on the scale was 43 and the highest scored comprised 25. Among all decision makers i.e., egalitarian, feminine, masculine, familial and non-specific, their decision making power is divided into three levels i.e., low, medium, high. Low levels of decision making power meant the decision taken up to 50 per cent by the women in the family (i.e., scoring up to 107 on the scale). The decision taken up to 50-70 per cent by the women (i.e., scoring 107-152 on the scale) was considered as medium level of Decision Making Power and similarly the decision taken up to 70-100 per cent by the women (i.e., scoring up to 152-215 on the scale) was regarded as high level of decision making power.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Women's Decision-Making Power

Table 1 depicts that 96.00 per cent married

women hold low level of feminine decision making power; whereas, only 4.00 per cent married women possess high level of power for participation in decision making. Such differences in decision making power among women for participation in decision making and their marital status is found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 2.04 with degree of freedom. Further the table shows that only 4.00 per cent married women possess middle level of power for participation in masculine decision-making power. About 90 per cent of married women possess low level of power for participation in familial decision-making, where as only 2.00 per cent of married women hold high level of power for participation in familial decision-making. Similarly, it is observed that 96 per cent of married women possess low level of familial decision-making power; whereas, only 4.00 per cent of unmarried women possess middle level of in familial decision-making power. Such differences in decision-making power among women and their marital status are found insignificant (p-value >0.05) at the  $\chi^2$  value 1.763 with 2 degree of freedom. Also, the table depicts that 96.00 per cent married women holds low level non-specific decision-making power. Whereas, only 4.00 per cent of married women possess middle level of non-specific decision making power, similarly, it is observed from the table that 80.00 per cent of unmarried women possess low level of non-specific decision-making power; whereas, only 2.50 per cent unmarried women hold high level of non-specific decision-making power. Such differences are found significant (p-value <0.05) at the  $\chi^2$  value 16.97 with 2 degree of freedom. Chafika (1995) stressed that progress in the status of women does not mean a step back for men. Participation in all decision-making is crucial and will serve the interest of society.

### Women's Decision-Making Power Related to their Fertility

Table 2 shows that 68 per cent married women possess feminine decision-making power for participation in family planning. It is also found that 66 per cent unmarried women possess feminine decision-making power for participation in family planning. Such differences in decision making power among women for participation in family planning is found highly significant (p-value <0.01) at the  $\chi^2$  value 17.90 with 4 degree of

**Table 1: Women's decision-making power (n = 100)**

Decision-making power	Marital status				Total	%	$\chi^2$ analysis
	Married		Unmarried				
	N	%	N	%			
<i>Egalitarian</i>							
Low	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	-
Middle	-	-	-	-	-	-	
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Feminine</i>							
Low	48	96.00	50	100.00	98	98.00	2.04 <sub>1</sub> *
Middle	-	-	-	-	-	-	
High	2	4.00	-	-	2	2.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Masculine</i>							
Low	48	96.00	50	100.00	98	98.00	2.04 <sub>1</sub> *
Middle	2	4.00	-	-	2	2.00	
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Familial</i>							
Low	45	90.00	48	96.00	93	93.00	1.763 <sub>2</sub> *
Middle	4	8.00	2	4.00	6	6.00	
High	1	2.00	-	-	1	1.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Non-Specific</i>							
Low	48	96.00	32	80.00	80	80.00	16.97 <sub>2</sub> **
Middle	2	4.00	7	17.50	9	9.00	
High	-	-	11	2.50	11	11.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage

\* p-value &gt;0.05

\*\*\* p-value &lt; 0.05

The degree of freedom as subscripts of  $\chi^2$  value

freedom. Mohammed et al. (2003), investigated perspective of mother in-law about intra-household decision-making, family size and family planning and their views were compared with sons and daughters in-law and their was found a marked difference in mother-in-laws, daughter-in-law and son's desire to have more children. Overall of mother-in-law role seems to be some what over showed by that of her son except for limiting family size.

However, it is observed from the table 2 that 82 per cent married women possess feminine decision-making power for birth control measures. Whereas, 72 per cent unmarried women possess feminine decision-making power for birth control measures. Such variation in decision-making power among women for participation in birth control measures and their marital status is found significant (p-value <0.05) at the  $\chi^2$  value 15.32 with 4 degree of freedom. Gupta (2003) found that birth control is an important decision and it mostly involves husbands domination indirectly to wives to interception chose and their types. However, Table 2 shows that 68 per cent married women holds familial decision-

making power for participation in control of unnatural abortion, whereas, only 2 per cent married women have egalitarian decision-making power for participation in control of unnatural abortions. Such difference in decision-making power among women for participation in control of unnatural abortion and their marital status is found highly significant (p-value <0.01) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 42.36 with 4 degree of freedom. Rackel (2000), examined that family planing allows parents to give the child the best choice for the nourishment and nurturing their needs, before another child is born. Spacing is also important for the health of the child, mother and the harming and financial health of the family unit. The ideal situation is good communication between husband and wife about the spacing and number of children.

### Women's Decision-Making Power related to their Children

Table 3 shows that 44 per cent of married women possess egalitarian decision-making power for health of children, whereas, only 6 per

**Table 2: Women's decision-making power related to their fertility (n = 100)**

Decision-making power	Marital Status				Total	%	$\chi^2$ analysis
	Married		Unmarried				
	N	%	N	%			
<i>Family Planning</i>							
Egalitarian	2	4.00	1	2.00	3	3.00	17.90 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	34	68.00	33	66.00	67	67.00	
Masculine	14	28.00	4	8.00	18	18.00	
Familial	-	-	2	4.00	2	2.00	
Non-specific	-	-	10	20.00	10	10.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Birth Control Measures</i>							
Egalitarian	1	2.00	-	-	1	1.00	15.32 <sub>4</sub> **
Feminine	41	82.00	36	72.00	77	77.00	
Masculine	6	12.00	3	6.00	9	9.00	
Familial	2	4.00	-	-	2	2.00	
Non-specific	-	-	11	22.00	11	11.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Control Unnatural Abortions</i>							
Egalitarian	1	2.00	1	2.00	2	2.00	42.36 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	9	18.00	-	-	9	9.00	
Masculine	3	6.00	1	2.00	4	4.00	
Familial	34	68.00	15	30.00	44	44.00	
Non-specific	3	6.00	33	66.00	36	36.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage

\*\* p-value &lt;0.05

\*\*\* p-value &lt;0.01

The degree of freedom in subscripts  $\chi^2$  value**Table 3: Women's decision-making power related to their children (n = 100)**

Decision-making power	Marital Status				Total	%	$\chi^2$ analysis
	Married		Unmarried				
	N	%	N	%			
<i>Health of Children</i>							
Egalitarian	22	44.00	12	24.00	34	34.00	40.210 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	18	36.00	5	10.00	23	23.00	
Masculine	3	6.00	4	8.00	7	7.00	
Familial	7	14.00	2	4.00	9	9.00	
Non-specific	-	-	27	54.00	27	27.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Education of Children</i>							
Egalitarian	2	4.00	1	2.00	3	3.00	38.80 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	13	26.00	1	2.00	14	14.00	
Masculine	5	10.00	5	10.00	10	10.00	
Familial	28	56.00	14	28.00	42	42.00	
Non-specific	2	4.00	29	58.00	31	31.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Marriage of Children</i>							
Egalitarian	-	-	-	-	-	-	36.65 <sub>3</sub> ***
Feminine	15	30.00	1	2.00	16	16.00	
Masculine	4	4.00	3	6.00	7	7.00	
Familial	28	56.00	15	30.00	42	42.00	
Non-specific	10	20.00	31	62.00	35	35.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage

\*\*\* p-value &lt;0.01

The degree of freedom as subscripts  $\chi^2$  value

cent of married women holds masculine decision-making power for health of children. The table shows that 54 per cent married women possess non-specific decision-making power for health of children; whereas, only 4.00 per cent unmarried women hold masculine decision-making power for health of children. Such variation in decision-making among women for participation in health of children and their marital status is found highly significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 40.21 with 4 degree of freedom. It is also observed from the table that 56 per cent married women possess familial decision-making power for education of children, whereas, 14 per cent married women possess egalitarian decision-making power for education of children. Similarly, the same table shows that 58 per cent unmarried women holds non-specific decision-making power for education of children, whereas, only 2 per cent of unmarried women have feminine decision-making power for education of children. Such variations in decision-making power among women for education of children are found highly significant ( $p$ -value of  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 38.44 with 4 degree of freedom. It is observed from the same table that 58 per cent of married women hold familial decision-making power for marriage of children, whereas, only 4 per cent of married women have masculine decision-making power for marriage of children. Accordingly the table shows that 62 per cent of unmarried women hold non-specific decision-making power for marriage of children. Such differences in decision-making power among women for marriage of children are found highly significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 36.65 with 3 degree of freedom. Hedman (1996) found that the family has the challenging task of educating and socialising children.

#### **Women's Decision-Making Power related to their Empowerment**

Table 4 shows that 54 per cent of married women possess masculine decision-making power for participation in local government, whereas, only 4 per cent of married women holds non-specific decision-making power for participation in local government. The same table shows that 60 per cent of unmarried women hold non-specific decision-making power for participation in local government. Such differences in decision-making power among women for par-

ticipation in local government is found highly significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 51.68 with 4 degree of freedom. Maria (2001), found that women's equal participation in political life play a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women.

It is also obvious from the table 4 that 54 per cent-married women bear masculine decision-making power for participation in income generating activity. Similarly, 38 per cent unmarried women hold non-specific decision-making power for participation in choice for income generating activity, whereas, only 6 per cent of unmarried women hold masculine decision-making power for participation in income generating activity. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in income generating is found highly significant ( $p$ -value of  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 42.43 with 4 degree of freedom. Eva (2006), found that ownership or control of household assets and income is a power determined of household bargaining power ensuring that women have opportunities to earn income. Acquired property can help to strengthen women's bargaining power, and influence in household decision.

Further it is obvious from the table 4 that 50 per cent of married women possess masculine decision-making power for visit to relatives. It also depicts that 54 per cent of unmarried women hold non-specific decision-making power for visit to relatives, whereas, only 4 per cent of unmarried women possess masculine decision-making power for visit to relatives. Such differences in decision-making power among women for visit to relatives are found highly significant ( $p$ -value of  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 46.74 with 4 degree of freedom. The table 4 shows that 56 per cent of married women possess masculine decision-making power for visit to friends, whereas, only 2 per cent of married women holds non-specific decision making power for visit to friends. Also, 46 per cent of unmarried women holds non-specific decision-making power for visit to friends; whereas, only 2 per cent of married women hold feminine decision-making power for participation in visit to friends. Such differences in decision-making power among women for visit to friends are found highly significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 48.65 with 4 degree of freedom. Eva and Schnawind (2006) also found differences between married and unmarried women in communication and standard for autonomy and de-

**Table 4: Women's decision-making power for their empowerment (n = 100)**

Decision-making power	Marital Status				Total	%	$\chi^2$ analysis
	Married		Unmarried				
	N	%	N	%			
<i>Participation in Local Government</i>							
Egalitarian	5	10.00	5	10.00	10	10.00	51.68 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	3	6.00	-	-	3	3.00	
Masculine	27	54.00	1	2.00	28	28.00	
Familial	13	26.00	14	28.00	27	27.00	
Non-specific	2	4.00	30	60.00	32	32.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Choice for Undertaking Income Generating Activity</i>							
Egalitarian	6	12.00	11	22.00	17	17.00	42.43 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	8	16.00	3	6.00	11	11.00	
Masculine	28	54.00	3	6.00	31	31.00	
Familial	7	14.00	14	28.00	21	21.00	
Non-specific	1	2.00	19	38.00	20	20.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Visit to Relatives</i>							
Egalitarian	7	14.00	3	6.00	10	10.00	46.74 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	5	10.00	3	6.00	8	8.00	
Masculine	25	50.00	2	4.00	27	27.00	
Familial	15	30.00	15	30.00	30	30.00	
Non-specific	-	-	27	54.00	27	27.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Visit to Friends</i>							
Egalitarian	8	16.00	7	14.00	15	15.00	48.65 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	3	6.00	1	2.00	4	4.00	
Masculine	28	56.00	1	2.00	29	29.00	
Familial	10	20.00	18	36.00	28	28.00	
Non-specific	1	2.00	23	46.00	24	24.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	
<i>Sale and Purchase of Property</i>							
Egalitarian	5	10.00	1	2.00	6	6.00	36.49 <sub>4</sub> ***
Feminine	11	22.00	-	-	11	11.00	
Masculine	7	14.00	1	2.00	8	8.00	
Familial	24	48.00	22	44.00	46	46.00	
Non-specific	3	6.00	26	52.00	29	29.00	
Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage

\*\*\* p-value  $< 0.01$ The degree of freedom as subscripts  $\chi^2$  value

cision making power regarding friendship and family and also regarding their relations.

Similarly, from table 4 it is found that 48 per cent women possess familial decision-making power for sale and purchase of property; whereas, only 6 per cent of married women hold non-specific decision-making power for sale and purchase of property. Table 4 depicts that 52 per cent of unmarried women possess non-specific decision-making power for sale and purchase of property. Such differences in decision-making power among women for sale and purchase of property are found highly significant (p-value  $< 0.01$ ) at the  $\chi^2$  value of 36.49 with 4 degree of freedom. Goode (1974) found through Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data that in the 30

surveyed countries, men dominated decision on major purchase such as land, care and livestock. Approximately 60 per cent of women in Egypt and more than a third of women in Bangladesh and Nepal felt excluded from such decisions related to purchase and sale of property. This is in contrast with countries surveyed in East Asia and Pacific Indonesia and the Philippines, where 18 per cent of women felt that they had say in sale and purchase of property.

## CONCLUSION

For the smooth running of a family, it is very important that equal status and equal power should be given to the basic constituents of

family, i.e., man and woman so that they can rear up their children in a better way, and solve their day to day problems for achieving their desired goals. Women possess low decision-making power in their families. Women mainly possess familial decision-making power in control on unnatural abortions. Married and unmarried women holds egalitarian decision-making power related to their health of children. Women possess familial decision-making power related to education of children and familial decision making power related to marriage of their children. Married and unmarried women mainly possess non-specific decision-making power for participation in local government and masculine decision-making power in choice for income generating activity. Married and unmarried women also hold familial decision-making power for visiting to their relatives. Women also possess masculine decision-making power for visiting to their friends and familial decision-making power for sale and purchase of property.

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