

# Assessment of Women Empowerment through Decision Making Power

## Abstract

The present study is carried out in Kashmir Region of Jammu and Kashmir. The study reveals that decision making power plays an important role in women empowerment. Women's role as mothers, which used to be regarded as their prime function, has traditionally been a source of power and status. When women's decision making power within households increases, they use it to direct more household resources toward the care and feeding of their children. The authority of the "man of the house" —whether he is the father, husband or brother— is not the only seat of power that is beginning to be challenged. Motherhood is also starting to be held in less esteem.

**Keywords:** Women, Decision Making, Empowerment.

## Introduction

Decision making can be regarded as the cognitive process resulting in the selection of a course of action among several alternative scenarios. Every decision making process produces a final choice (Reason, 1990). Making a decision implies that there are alternative choices to be considered, and in such a case, an individual not only identifies as many of these alternatives as possible but to choose the one that has the highest probability of success or effectiveness and the best fits with one's goals, desires, lifestyle and values (Harris, 2012). One way of thinking holds that the mental process of decision-making is (or should be) rational, a formal process based on optimizing utility (Kant, 1991). Rational thinking and decision-making does not leave much room for emotions (Livet, 2010). In fact, emotions are often considered irrational occurrences that may distort reasoning (Barnes and Thagard, 1996). In recent years a growing body of research has shown that emotion can profoundly influence a variety of cognitive functions (Cytowic, 1996; Damasio, 1994; Johnson and Tversky, 1983). Among these investigations one area that receives increasing attention from both theoretical and applied fields is decision making in different situations. The experimental study of the emotional influences requires the induction of emotions in order to determine their effects (Martin, 1990). Specifically, positive emotions and negative emotions have been found to influence decisions in different ways, resulting in diverse choice behaviours (Isen, 2001; Kahn and Isen, 1993; Williams, Zainuba and Jackson, 2003). However, the research findings are quite contradictory regarding the effects of emotions, largely due to the fact that various studies adopt different operationalisations of positive emotions and negative emotions, as well as of decision making (see Hockey, Maule, Clough and Bdzola, 2000). Research conducted by Isen and Patrick put forth the theory of "mood maintenance" which states that happy decision-makers are reluctant to gamble. In other words, happy people decide against gambling, since they would not want to undermine the happy feeling (Isen and Patrick, 1983). Alternately, the influence of negative feelings at the time of decision-making was studied by Raghunathan and Tuan Pham (1999). They stated that anxiety and sadness convey distinct types of information to the decision-makers and set prime different goals. While anxiety primes an implicit goal of uncertainty reduction, sadness primes an implicit goal of reward replacement (Raghunathan and Tuan Pham, 1999). Thus emotions cannot simply be classified as positive or negative as one need to consider the consequences of the emotions in ultimate decision-making. Emotions hence have potential to rule on decision making process. Researchers moreover argue that important factor is the memory of events in decision making. The mood someone has works as "a retrieval cue" whereby happy feelings make positive materials come to mind which in turn have great impact on the decisions that are made. The same is true of negative feelings (Isen and Shalcker, 1982). Bower (1981) coined the term state-

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dependent remembering for this phenomenon. Bowen and others stated that emotions and feelings cannot be extracted from the human mind. The emotions felt in a particular situation will be recorded in the emotional memory and can be activated when the person faces a similar situation or has to make a difficult decision in a short period of time. Often the decision maker is unaware of previous experiences in similar situations (Bower, 1981 and Sayegh, et. al, 2004). Pfister and Bohm (2008) developed a classification of how emotions function in decision-making that conceptualizes an integral role for emotions, rather than simply influencing decision-making.

#### **Review of Literature**

Women have different roles such as mother, wife, daughter, and sister which they perform at different stages of their lives. A woman being a wife is still expected bringing up children and they are forced to do everything. All these duties are a carry-over of the tribal cum-feudal society, in which the women are considered as property (Batool 2002). Gender equality in democratic governance is very uneven; in most of the world, women are under-represented in positions of power (Anonymous, 2011). The studies about decision-making in family life show 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 very 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 unimportant and trivial by both husband and wife for instance, choosing the house interior decorations (Edgell 1980). Abbot and Wallace (1990) had reported that less important decision-making such as food preparation or shopping for children's clothes was up to women. Decisions within families may be classified into several types: instrumental, affective, social, economic, and technical. Instrumental decisions are those which rest on functional issues such as providing money, shelter, and food for the family members (Epstein, Bishop, and Baldwin 1982). Affective decisions deal with choices related to feelings and emotions. Decisions such as whether to get married are affective. Social decisions (Noller and Fitzpatrick 1993) are those related to the values, roles, and goals of the family, such as decisions about whether one parent will stay at home while the children are preschool age. Economic decisions focus on choices about using and gathering family resources. Whether an eighteen-year old child should get a job and contribute to the family income is an economic decision. Technical decisions relate to all the sub-decisions that have to be made to carry out a main decision. For instance, if a family decides that one member will quit work and go to college, then a

variety of technical decisions must be made to enact that decision (Noller and Fitzpatrick 1993). Families use a variety of processes for actually reaching a decision. Many families have a habitual process that they use regularly whenever they need to make a decision. Other families vary in the way they approach decision making depending on the type of decision, their mood, and their stage of development. However, Bajtelsmit and Jianakoplos (2000) in their study compared the retirement plan asset allocation patterns of women and men in 1989 and 1998 and found that, although women were still less inclined to invest in stock than men, the gap had narrowed over the decade. Yusof and Duasa (2010) tested two opposing models of household behaviour, the income pooling hypothesis and the bargaining model, by examining the final decision-making and expenditure patterns of married men and women in Malaysia. The data used was from the responses of 1,778 married persons obtained from a survey of employed Malaysians. The results show that women are often the final decision-makers on everyday household expenditures while men make the final decisions on large household expenditures, but both men and women practice autonomy in decisions related to financial investments. In spending, variations are observed between men and women in their level and proportion of expenditure of certain categories of goods and services. Relative earning share is a significant factor in decision making as well as consumption expenditure. These results tend to support the bargaining model of household decision-making.

Tam and Pilar (2015) found that around the world, women now have more influence over the decisions that affect their lives. In even the most conservative societies, feminists and gender advocates have been able to forward more equitable policies and outcomes. Important drivers of women's political power and influence include improved access to education and material assets, more equal and inclusive politics, strong women's movements and women being effective political operators. Increases in women's political power are not uniform. Some women have more influence than others, both within and between countries. Men continue to dominate some sectors and the most powerful positions in society.

National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2017) stresses on the acceleration of the equal participation of women in every field of public and professional life, especially in the decision-making positions, in the parliament and in the local authorities, eliminate the discrimination against women and strengthen the assurance of gender equality in public life and politics, policies that will lead to the balanced participation of women and men in the elections and d) the reinforcement and development of women abilities and skills in order to actively participate in the procedures of decision-making centers and leading positions.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. Study Women's Empowerment through their Decision Making Power

2. Analyze the extend of Decision Making Power among women

### Methodology

The study was conducted in the Kashmir region of Jammu and Kashmir State in India. There are 10 districts in the Kashmir division namely, Srinagar, (summer capital of the State), Baramulla, Bandipora, Ganderbal, Badgam, Kupwara, Pulwama, Kulgam, Shopian and Anantnag. All of them were encompassed during the study. The reason for selection of districts was sociological and methodological. The sample comprised 1200 families following the criteria of one woman per family. The women respondents' age were above 18 years, i.e. they were able to contract under section II of the Jammu and Kashmir Contract Act Samvat, 1977. For the study, Multistage Sampling technique was used. This type of sampling was taken because the size of population (i.e. Kashmir) was very large and was scattered as per socio-economic characteristics of women. The field work was revolved mainly around the interview schedule/ questionnaire and a research inventory namely 'Decision Making Power among Women' (DMPW) devised under the study.

### Results and Discussion

Figure 1 and Table 1 analyses empowerment of women through DMP. Only SID is found at moderate level among women by 53.1 per cent ( $f = 637$ ); while other six dimensions of the inventory are observed at low levels. FHD is low among women by 70.2 per cent ( $f = 843$ ), SD by 76.8 per cent ( $f = 921$ ); FD by 71.3 per cent ( $f = 856$ ), LPD by 87.2 per cent ( $f = 1047$ ); SMRD by 79.3 per cent ( $f = 952$ ) and DD by 76.3 per cent ( $f = 425$ ). DMP among never married women is low by 73.5 per cent ( $f = 441$ ), moderate by 10 per cent ( $f = 600$ ) and high by 16.5 per cent ( $f = 99$ ). Among ever married women, their DMP is low by 61.7 per cent ( $f = 370$ ), moderate by 29.8 per cent ( $f = 179$ ) and high by only 8.5 per cent ( $f = 51$ ). Overall, 15.0 per cent ( $f = 180$ ) have moderate DMP; while only 12.5 per cent ( $f = 150$ ) have high DMP. Chi square test of independence of attributes show highly significant differences within the levels of all the dimensions of DMP. Highly significant differences are seen within the levels of SID at  $\chi^2(2, N = 1200) = 775.98, p < 0.0001$ ; SD at  $\chi^2(2, N = 1200) = 1027.36, p < 0.001$ ; FD at  $\chi^2(2, N = 1200) = 825.84, p < 0.001$ ; LPD at  $\chi^2(2, N = 1200) = 1572.09, p < 0.001$ ; SMRD at  $\chi^2(2, N = 1200) = 1187.76, p < 0.001$ ; DD at  $\chi^2(2, N = 557) = 479.15, p < 0.001$ . DMP among never married women have shown highly significant differences at  $\chi^2(2, N = 600) = 439.41, p < 0.001$ ; while as ever married women have shown highly significant differences at  $\chi^2(2, N = 600) = 257.71, p < 0.001$ . Overall, there are also highly significant differences within the levels of DMP at  $\chi^2(2, N = 1200) = 829.50, p < 0.001$ . Hence, null hypotheses are rejected in cases of all dimensions of the inventory, as well as for DMP as a broad factor.

Table 2 assesses differences within the levels (low, moderate and high) of DMP. The least mean score ( $M = 17.35, SD = 1.41, N = 952$ ) is found on SMRD; while highest mean score ( $M = 152.37, SD$

$= 8.58, N = 65$ ) is depicted by SID. Moderate mean score of decision making for never married women is less ( $M = 758.99, SD = 87.83, N = 179$ ) than ever married women ( $M = 629.80, SD = 60.00, N = 60$ ). Mean score for DMP at low level is reflective among ever married women ( $M = 382.37, SD = 41.00, N = 441$ ) than never married women ( $M = 440.44, SD = 99.90, N = 370$ ). However, mean score for DMP at high level of inventory is more among never married women ( $M = 732.81, SD = 31.73, N = 51$ ) than ever married women ( $M = 638.54, SD = 99.00, N = 99$ ). Overall, DMP is low at  $M = 442.64, SD = 67.18, N = 870$ , Moderate at  $M = 719.01, SD = 87.80, N = 180$  and high  $M = 740.04, SD = 32.33, N = 150$ ). Relating Table 2 with Table 3, ANOVA has shown highly significant differences in levels of all dimensions of inventory. Self Identity Decisions are significant at  $F(2, 1197) = 64.64, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.10$ . The significance of FHD is at  $F(2, 1197) = 72.32, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.10$ . Social Decisions are significant at  $F(2, 1197) = 79.67, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.11$ . Similarly Financial decisions are found significant at  $F(2, 1197) = 86.87, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.12$ . Significant differences are found between the levels of LPD at  $F(2, 1197) = 76.35, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.11$ . Moreover, SMRD are significant at  $F(2, 1197) = 10.67, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.2$ . Descendent decisions are observed significant at  $F(2, 554) = 41.58, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.13$ . Overall, the inventory DMP is highly significant at  $F(2, 1197) = 79.72, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.11$ . The strength of relationship, as assessed by  $\eta^2$  are very strong, between the levels of SID, FHD, SD, FD, LPD, DD and DMP ( $\eta^2 \geq 0.1$ ). However, small strength of relationship is assessed between the levels of SMRD ( $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). Moreover, based on Cohen's (1988) conventions of interpreting effect size, the actual differences in the mean scores between the groups are found quite large for SID, FHD, SD, FD, LPD, SMRD, DD and DMP ( $d > 0.14$ ). Thus there are significant evidences to reject the null hypotheses and put forth that there are significant differences between the levels of decision making among all the seven dimensions of the inventory and DMP as a broad factor.

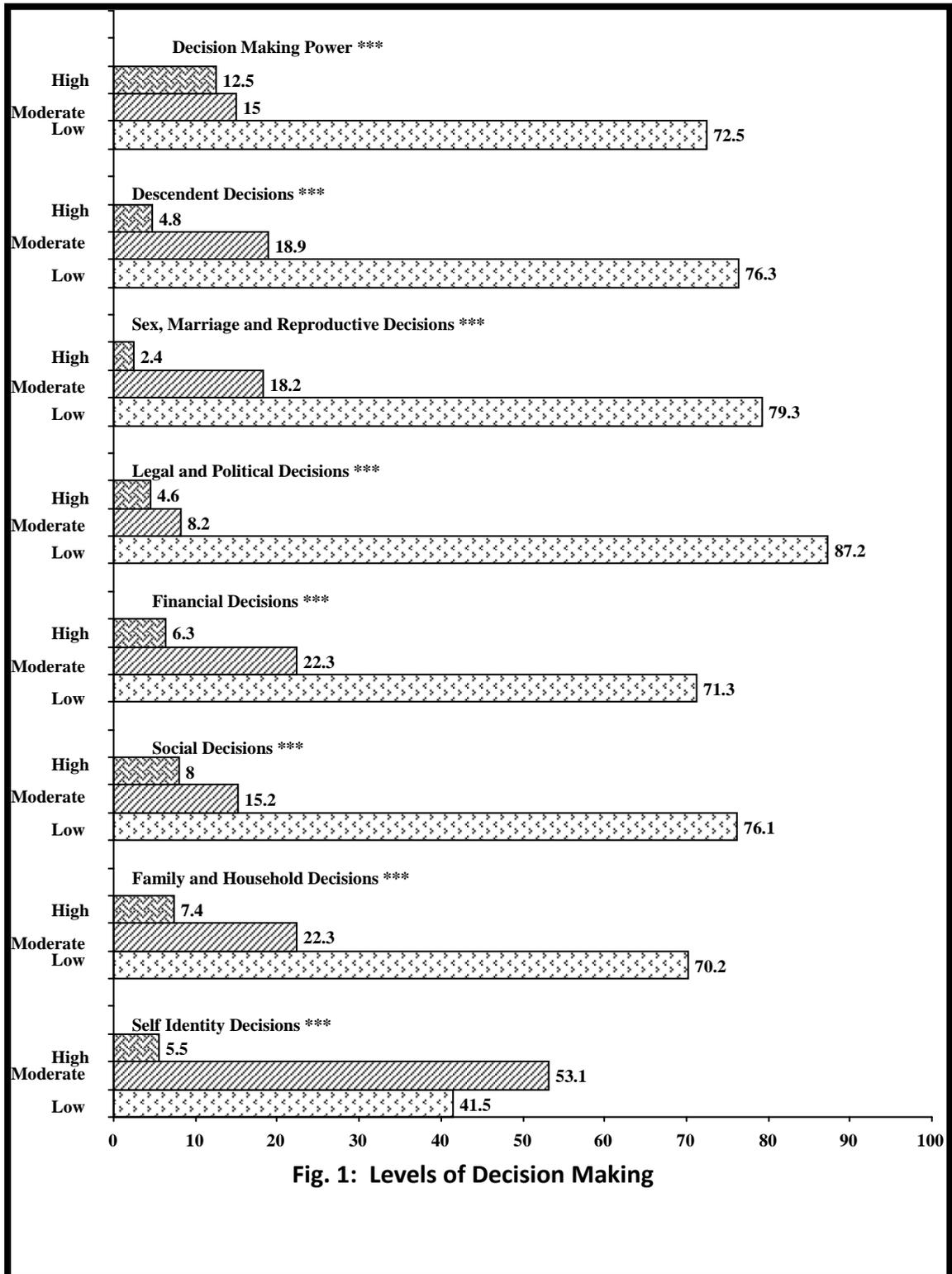
Homes are gendered spaces and it appears that women do more than men within families to construct the home (Perkins and Thorns, 1999) and to complete household chores (Douchet, 2001); in essence, this is their domain (Allen and Hawkins, 1999). This is highly evident in the families where the wives and mothers frequently control family tasks (Hochschild (1989), triple shift (Duncombe and Marsden, 1995) or the invisible work (Daniels, 1987) of women) they were reluctant to relinquish some of their duties to other family members. Early family studies documented the dominance of women within specific domains of decision making, such as choosing clothes for family members, etc (Mohan, 1995; Davis and Rigaux, 1974). Several theories are used in the field of women in decision-making. When the woman contributes to financial resources, there seems to be an equality of power between both family members, a result which is congruent with the theory of relative resources. Such theory maintains that the

member with a higher education level or a better paid job will obtain a greater influence on the other (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Robertson 1990; Webster 1995). This theory establishes that the authority of each spouse in decision-making processes directly depends on the context in which each member attributes value resources to the other. Thus, Bartos (1982) pointed out that women who worked out of home were more likely to take part in holiday decision-making than those who were simply housewives. Spiro (1983) affirmed that some men who earned more than their spouses were more likely to impose their authority in decision-making processes, adopting a head-of-the family role. Martinez and Polo (1999) found that joint decisions were more common among couples where the wife worked out of home, whereas the husband's control was higher if she did not work. Weber (1978) believed that classical status resulted from the situation in the labour market; it meant that groups which had equal position based on bargain and power made the same class. In this theory, class is a masculine concept because men look for jobs in the labour market and compete with each other. So, women do not have any position (Abbot and Wallace 1990; Ingelhart (1997) has explained the increase of participation in the west world based on three factors: improving the level of education and political information, changes in governing norms of women's participation and changes in value priorities which emphasize less on instant natural needs and emphasize more on the right. According to Ingelhart (1997), some variables such as formal education, socio-economic status, information and skill levels, job experiences, organized networks, and the reduction of gender differences in social and political duties have influenced the increase in woman participation. Watt, Hiqqins, and Kendrick (2000) classified the kind of women's participation and its function. Watt expressed the experience of women's participation to explain the status of nominal participation. Instrumental participation is observed in some African countries, when the governmental investment in fundamental issues severely decreases (García 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 analyze 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.

#### **Conclusion**

The decision-making in family is one of the ways of the female empowerment. Participation in decision-making process in household matters considers that a female is accounted for in the family. In all societies, the issue of women's participation and how they participate in economic, social and cultural related issues is considered to be important. Family decision-making has changed over the last several decades. Changing roles of women, increasing women's education, and increasing participation of women in the labour force are important keys for family decision-making changes. In nearly all developing countries, women are more likely to be illiterate. Almost all women in every society marry and have children, women's dedicated bond to family and household responsibilities means that they have fewer opportunities to assume public roles in the society. They must fit into schooling, jobs, or political activity around those family roles. However, women usually have less power than men even within the family. The recognition of effective factors on women's involvement in family is among the important debates in family studies. In the previous generation, the link between the man and woman especially in traditional marriages was mainly based on arranged duty. Nowadays, the duty of men and women is not fixed as they used to be in the past. The other alternate refers to changing the situation of women and their authority over men. Now, women's power in family life is counsellor administrator, etc more than ever. Nevertheless, women have different roles such as mother, wife, daughter, and sister which they perform at different stages of their lives. A women being a wife is still expected bringing up children and they are forced to do everything. All these duties are a carry-over of the tribal cum-feudal society, in which the women are considered as property (Batool 2002).



**Table 1: Empowerment of Women through Decision Making Power**

Variables	Decisions Making Power (DMP)						$\chi^2$ Analysis (Pearson)
	Low DMP		Moderate DMP		High DMP		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
SID	498	41.5	637	53.1	65	5.4	444.99 <sub>2</sub> ***
FHD	843	70.2	268	22.3	89	7.4	775.98 <sub>2</sub> ***
SD	921	76.8	183	15.2	96	8.0	1027.36 <sub>2</sub> ***
FD	856	71.3	268	22.3	76	6.3	825.84 <sub>2</sub> ***
LPD	1047	87.2	98	8.2	55	4.6	1572.09 <sub>2</sub> ***
SMRD	952	79.3	219	18.2	29	2.4	1187.76 <sub>2</sub> ***
DD <sup>a</sup>	425	76.3	105	18.9	27	4.8	479.15 <sub>2</sub> ***
DMP <sup>b</sup> Never Married	441	73.5	60	10.0	99	16.5	439.41 <sub>2</sub> ***
DMP <sup>b</sup> Ever Married	370	61.7	179	29.8	51	8.5	257.71 <sub>2</sub> ***
DMP	870	72.5	180	15.0	150	12.5	829.50 <sub>2</sub> ***

Based on Field Survey

n=1200

a denotes n=557

b denotes n=600

Row Percentage

Degree of Freedom (df) in Sub Scripts of  $\chi^2$  Values

\*\*\*p&lt; 0.001

**Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics of Low, Moderate and High Decision Making Power**

Variables	N	M	SD	S.E	
<b>Self Identity Decisions</b>	Low	498	78.30	4.02	0.19
	Moderate	637	111.42	16.25	0.85
	High	65	152.37	8.58	0.43
<b>Family and Household Decisions</b>	Low	843	34.00	0.00	0.00
	Moderate	268	91.64	8.29	0.42
	High	89	121.89	15.88	0.84
<b>Social Decisions</b>	Low	921	40.39	4.77	0.15
	Moderate	183	93.77	16.12	0.94
	High	96	108.84	20.59	0.59
<b>Financial Decisions</b>	Low	856	56.56	2.95	0.15
	Moderate	268	92.00	0.00	0.00
	High	76	145.72	19.67	1.16
<b>Legal and Political Decisions</b>	Low	1047	38.43	4.70	0.16
	Moderate	98	72.00	0.00	0.00
	High	55	94.58	17.30	1.11
<b>Sex, Marriage and Reproductive Decisions</b>	Low	952	17.35	1.41	0.06
	Moderate	219	23.08	2.46	0.12
	High	29	41.30	10.14	0.56

<b>Descendent Decisions</b>	Low	425	23.30	1.83	0.12
	Moderate	105	59.90	11.00	0.76
	High	27	91.11	12.72	0.96
<b>Decision Making Power EM</b>	Low	441	382.37	41.00	5.35
	Moderate	60	629.80	60.00	5.81
	High	99	638.54	99.00	0.13
<b>Decision Making Power NM</b>	Low	370	440.44	99.90	4.20
	Moderate	179	758.99	87.83	1.19
	High	51	732.81	31.73	1.04
<b>Decision Making Power</b>	Low	870	442.64	67.18	5.66
	Moderate	180	719.01	87.80	3.99
	High	150	740.04	32.33	2.63

Based on Field Survey

N=1200

EM denotes Ever Married

NM denotes Never Married

**Table 3: Analysis of Low, Moderate and High Levels of Various Dimensions of Decision Making Process**

Dimensions	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	f-Value	Level of Significance	Partial Eta Squared ( $\eta^2$ )	Cohen's D	
							Cohen's Effect Size (d)	(r)
<b>Self Identity Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	96610.07	2	48305.03	64.64	0.000	0.10	6.98	0.96
Within Groups	894438.05	1197	747.23					
<b>Family and Household Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	113024.24	2	56512.16	72.32	0.000	0.10	5.59	0.94
Within Groups	935252.57	1197	781.33					
<b>Social Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	59759.19	2	29879.59	79.67	0.000	0.11	4.60	0.91
Within Groups	448894.03	1197	375.01					
<b>Financial Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	129518.73	2	64759.36	86.87	0.000	0.12	6.73	0.95
Within Groups	892273.10	1197	745.42					
<b>Legal and Political Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	24535.33	2	12267.66	76.35	0.000	0.11	9.04	0.97
Within Groups	192317.91	1197	160.66					
<b>Sex, Marriage and Reproductive Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	2628.44	2	1314.22	10.67	0.000	0.02	4.30	0.90
Within Groups	147428.30	1197	123.16					
<b>Descendent Decisions</b>								
Between Groups	33597.18	2	16798.59	41.58	0.000	0.13	5.57	0.94
Within Groups	223771.84	554	403.92					
<b>Decision Making Power</b>								
Between Groups	4097194.09	2	2048597.04	79.72	0.000	0.11	4.60	0.91
Within Groups	30758295.90	1197	25696.15					

Based on Field Survey

n=1200

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