

Women`S Position in Household Decision Making and Violence in Marriage: The Case of North Gondar Zone, Northwest Ethiopia

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Abstract

Introduction: In many developing countries, women have low decision-making power; and domestic violence remained pervasive and a serious human right violation. In Ethiopia, femininity remains an indicator of major disadvantage. The country is ranked 127th out of 142 countries (15th from the bottom) indicating large gender disparities. Thus, this study was aimed to assess women`s position in household decision making and domestic violence in North Gondar Zone, northwest Ethiopia.

Methods: A cross sectional community-based household survey was conducted in April 2016. A Sample of 500 married women was selected by using multistage sampling technique. The data were entered into Epi-Info 3.5.1 and transferred to SPSS 20 for analysis.

Results: Around fifty percent of the sampled women reported that their husbands decide in their stead. Besides, more than 50% of the respondents replied as they usually get into forced sex (54.1%); always threatened by different objects (65.9%) and their husbands always beat them (53.8%). Women`s education, motivation, and involvement in business were found positively significant determinants for women`s household decision-making status.

Conclusion: The household decision making position of women was found very low especially in major decisions. In similar vein, domestic violence is highly prevalent in the study area.

Keywords: Women, Household decision making, domestic violence, North Gondar Zone

1. Introduction

The women`s household decision-making refers to women's involvement alone or jointly with their husbands in making large household purchases, daily household purchases, determining own health care, and visiting family or relatives(1). Human beings have the right to participate in decisions that affect their life space(2). The equal participation of women with men at all levels of decision making is then considered as vital for effective action in all aspects of sustainable development (3).

A woman's say in household decisions is one aspect of her well-being and a means of improving children's outcomes(4). Hence, enabling them to make decisions to perform significant roles in household decision making is a key aspect. However, in most societies, low educational level, and patriarchal societal structures which perpetuate unequal power between sexes make women to take a low position in decision making. There are low levels of decision-making between both sexes even among educated women and women working for cash(5). This gender disparity tends to be larger in countries with low GDP per capita(4).

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Unequal power relations between sexes are a fundamental way in which societies are organized and gender inequalities between women and men remain common problem in developing countries(6). Consequently, their interests and choices are neglected and their skills and experiences are not used for decisions related to household and community issues(7).

As one dimension of gender problem, domestic violence occurs among all societies and it is a manifestation of gender inequality which is considered as an act of maintaining power. It has been defined as “the range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male intimate partners.” on top of low position in decision making, in most developing countries, thousands of women and girls are victims of domestic violence, including sexual abuse, trafficking and early and forced marriage(8). Similarly, women in most African countries live in the situation above. As WHO study reported domestic violence ranged from 15%-17% in which the latter one refers the rural Ethiopia (9). Most of the time, the cause for women’s domestic violence is a result of the unequal power relationship between women & men; and linked with development particularly with the decision-making ability of women(10). Ethiopia, as a signatory to many international human rights instruments, has been striving for the promotion and protection of women’s rights to participate in development endeavors and equally participate in the fruits of development. However, despite those efforts femininity remains an indicator of major disadvantage in Ethiopia. According to the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report, the country ranks 127th out of 142 countries (i.e., 15th from the bottom) indicating large gender disparities(11). There is a significant gender gap in the country and women are economically, socially, culturally and politically disadvantaged in the enjoyment of equal rights, in accessing opportunities, decision-making processes, and basic resources(12, 13). Only 13% of currently married women make their own decisions on their own health care, and one woman of every four indicated that her husband mainly makes such decisions. Percent of women who make these decisions by themselves are only six(1). The situation in the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) is not different; rural women in the region are mostly engaged in looking after family members, fetching water, cooking etc(14) and only 15.5% women are involved in all areas of decision(15). The main purpose of this study, therefore, was to assess women’s household decision making power and status of domestic violence in North Gondar Zone, northwest Ethiopia.

2. Methods

A cross-sectional community-based study was conducted in three districts of the zone: Dabat, Dembia and Gondar Zuria; and one city administration (Gondar Town) in April 2016. The study was conducted on 500 married women where the sample size was calculated assuming 50% proportion, 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. Considering 10% non response rate, the total sample size determined was 424. However to increase the power of the study the sample size taken was 500. Multistage sampling technique was used where four districts out of the 23 districts of the zone and one kebele from each district was randomly selected, and finally, the respondents were selected via systematic random sampling. The dependent variable was women’s household decision-making status (“yes” if decisions made alone or jointly; and “no” if decisions made by her husband alone); and the independent variables included were related to the socio demographic characteristics of the respondent, respondents motivation, experience of women towards domestic violence, and involvement in business. The questionnaire was pre tested on local people living outside the selected kebeles. Thirteen experts from the zone civil service office were used for data collection and supervision. Data were entered into Epi-Info 3.5.1 and transferred to SPSS 20 for descriptive and simple linear regression analysis.

Operational definitions

Household decision making: household decisions made alone or jointly with husbands on major purchases, daily purchase, and own health care. Thus, those who answered “respondent alone” or “respondent and husband” are considered as having a say in household decisions and coded as “1”. And those who reported “husband alone” are considered as not having a say and coded “0”. Major decisions are decisions related to finance and expensive purchases such as borrowing money, land renting, lending animals, and selling agricultural and animal products; and decisions on own health care. Domestic violence: includes physical, verbal, emotional, economic, and sexual abuses by a husband. Ethical clearance was obtained from University of Gondar, Research, and Community services vice president office; and permission letter from zonal women and children affairs office. Participants were informed about the study purpose; confidentiality; and the right to refuse. Verbal consent was taken from each study participants.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Socio demographic characteristics of the study population

A total of 500 married women participated in the study with a response rate of 97%. From the total respondents, 84% were between the age of 18 to 45 with the mean age of 35.4 (± 10.7). The majority of the respondents were also Orthodox Christians by religion (97.2%), illiterate (38.8%), and 69.5% housewife (Table 1).

Table1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study population

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
<30	186	37%
30-45	234	47%
>45	79	16%
Religion		
Orthodox	480	97.2%
Muslim	11	2.2 %
Others	3	0.6 %
Education		
Illiterate	196	38.8%
Able to read and write	66	13.1%
Primary education	75	14.9%
Secondary school & above	145	28.7%
Occupation		
Housewife	347	69.5%
Farmer	38	7.6%
Employee	60	12.0%
Merchant	31	6.2%
Others	24	4.7%

3.2. Women`s involvement in household decisions

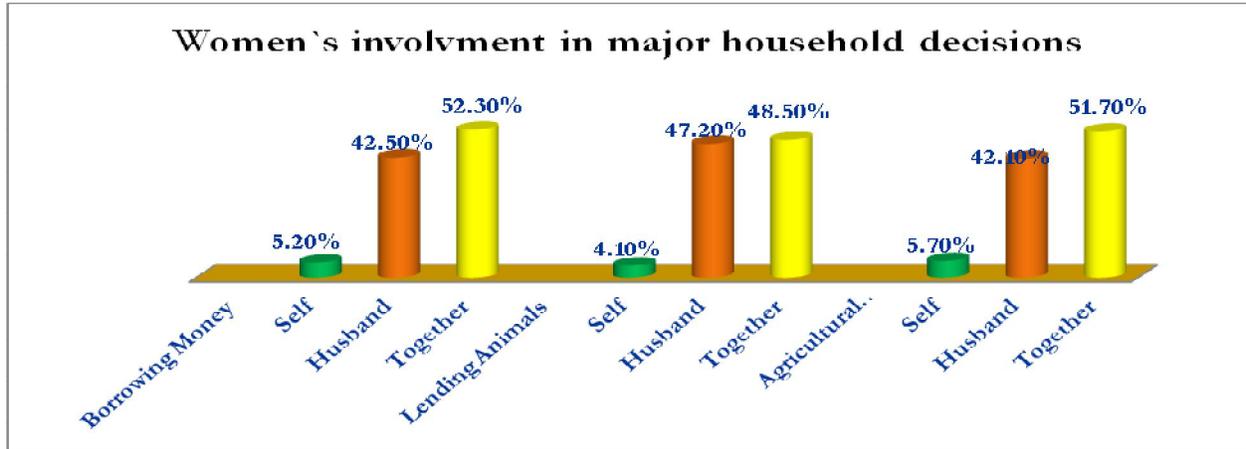
A significant number of respondents (around 50%) reported as their husbands decide without involving them (Table2).

Table2. Women`s involvement in major decisions

Area of decision making	Frequency	Percentage
Land renting		
Self	12	2.5%
Husband	217	45.3%
Together	249	52%
Other	1	0.2%
Purchasing cattle		
Self	8	2%
Husband	193	49.2%
Together	189	48.2%
Other	2	0.5%
Start own work or not		
Self	50	10.1%
Husband	126	25.6%
Together	314	63.7%
Others	3	0.6%
Your own health care?		
Self	72	14.4%
Husband	118	23.6%
Together	310	62%

Major household decisions such as land renting, house building, and purchasing cattle made only by women were found less than 3%. Similarly, on other decisions related with borrowing money, lending animals, and selling agricultural products; the involvement of the target group in decision makings was found around 50 % (Figure1).

Figure1. Women`s involvement in major decisions



Almost half of the respondent's husband decides by themselves without involving their wives. In selling livestock products respondents are found to have a relatively better decisional role; around 30% of the participants reported as they can decide on the issue alone. Decisional power on own health is considered as a vital indicator of empowerment. In this regard, only 14.4% of the respondents have that power. For 62% of the respondent, their own health care is decided together with the husband (Table3).

Table3: Women`s involvement in other decisions

Decision area	Frequency	Percentage
Contraceptive use or not		
Self	199	44%
Husband	24	5.3%
Together	220	48.7%
Others	9	2%
Decisions on children`s schooling		
Self	25	5.1%
Husband	94	19.1%
Together	370	75.4%
Household daily consumption purchase		
Self	331	66.3%
Husband	39	7.8%
Together	129	25.9%
Food type to be cooked		
Self	435	88.6%
Husband	16	3.3%
Together	40	8.1%

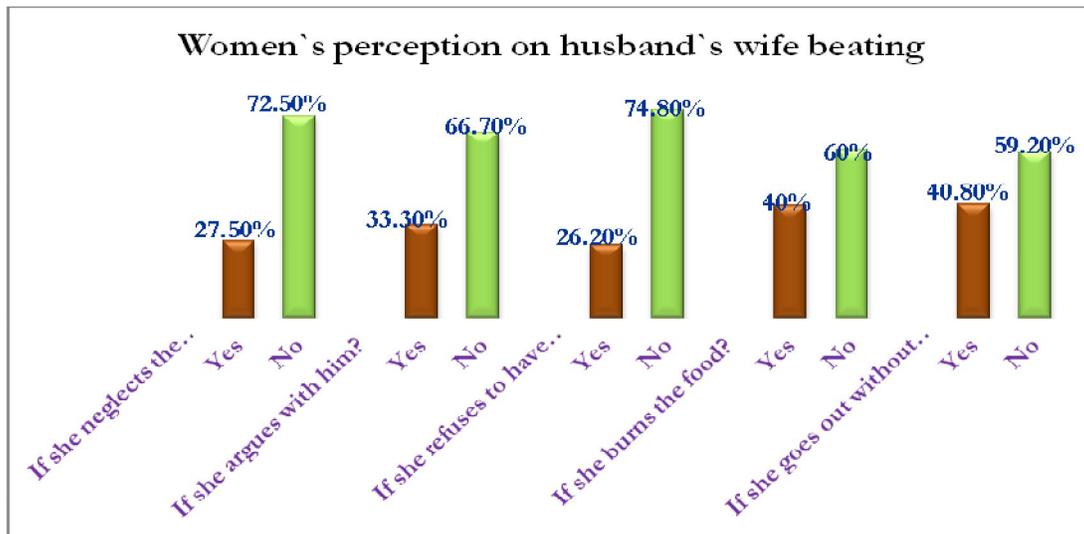
The decisional role of women in common household activities seems relatively better. Besides, their involvement in minor decisions (purchasing food stuff, and cooking food types) is significant. About 66% of the respondents can decide on making household purchases for daily needs by themselves, and 88.6 % can decide on what food should be cooked every day. This might indirectly reflect the burden that women`s have in home management.

3.3. Women`s attitude towards domestic violence

About 59.2% of the respondents said that a husband shouldn't beat his wife if she goes out without his permission.

While 40.8% of the respondents agreed the reaction of husbands towards their wife in such condition should follow beatings. This finding is similar to a study conducted in Ethiopia which pointed out that 68-81% women said if husbands have justifiable situations wife beating is possible. And about 88% of rural and 69% urban women have believed that husbands have the right to beat their wife(10)(Figure 2).

Figure 2. Women`s perception on wife beating



Another reflective issue was a husband has a right to beat his wife if she argues with him. Hence 65.8% of the respondents replied “no”. With regard to sex refusal and inappropriate preparation of food, 74.8% and 60% of the respondents believed a husband shouldn’t beat his wife for the reasons explained above, respectively. Likewise, a study conducted in Uganda indicated that 16% of studied men and 28% of women justified the appropriateness of women beatings for those who refused to have sex with their partners (16).

3.4. Women`s existing situation in domestic violence

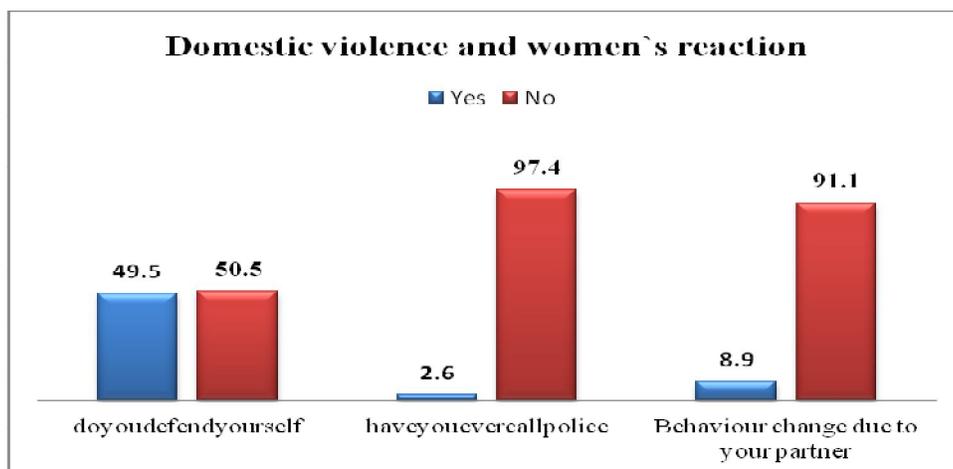
According to different scholars, violence has multi-dimensional causes and stories. Thus questions related to assessing husband`s personal story were included. About 62.5% of the respondents replied they have been always controlled by their husbands in their everyday activity including their relationship with friends. The majority of the respondents (61.8%) reported that their husbands suspect them of having love affairs with other men, and 59.8% answered as their husbands mostly devalue them in front of others. About 62.8% of the respondents explained as their husband always discouraged and prohibited them from establishing new same sex friendship and communications, and 48.3% of the respondents answered as they always feel alone. In addition, 55.4% mentioned their husbands always forward negative comments regularly on her dressing, styles and related to food preparation issues. In the same manner, a study conducted in Uganda indicated that 40.1% of studied women experienced verbal violence, threats, abuse and yelling; while 30.4% of the women faced physical violence(16). Around 51.1% of the respondents expressed their husbands always strictly follows up the money spent on different things. For the frequent mood change especially anger mood happens always for 42.5% and sometimes for 35.5%. Furthermore, about 58.8% of the respondents replied their husband always get disturbed in the socioeconomic commitment their wives are involved or expected to take part. Besides, 54.1% of the respondents said they are always getting into forced sex (Table4).

Table 4. Women`s existing situation in domestic violence

Area	Frequency	Percentage
Do you quarrel due to money	2	.4
Always	228	46.2
Most of the time	152	30.8
Sometimes	107	21.7
Never		
Does he pressure you for sex	12	2.4
Always	268	54.1
Most of the time	119	24.0
Sometimes	95	19.2
Never		
Does he throw an object	3	.6
Always	273	55.7
Most of the time	78	15.9
Sometimes	132	26.9
Never		
Does he cause injury		
Always	62	12.5
Most of the time	265	53.3
Sometimes	31	6.2
Never	134	27.0
Violent toward children	6	1.2
Always	307	61.9
Most of the time	45	9.1
Sometimes	136	27.4
Never		

Most of the time the habit of drinking alcohol affected the emotionality of husbands to get into anger situations. In view of this, 47.8% of the respondents explained their husband always get into angry situation when he drinks alcohol. Women in Uganda whose husband frequently drinks alcohol are at the risk of their partners` violence five times higher than those women`s partners who didn`t drink alcohol (16). With respect to the disagreement due to rearing children or with money issues, 54.3% and 46.2% said they are always facing problem /dispute with their husbands respectively. Besides, 53.8% of the respondents also explained that their husbands always beat them; and 65.9% of the respondents reflected that they were always threatened by different objects like sharpened materials (Figure 3).

Figure3. domestic violence and women`s reaction



Those who were always threatened to be killed accounted to 66.8%. Moreover, 53.3% of the respondents replied they have always got physical injuries after beaten. Likewise, a study done in South Africa showed that between 40%-70% of women are killed by their partners and this happened after repeated domestic violence stories (Carstens, 2007). Concerning any violence happened on children by their father, 61.9% said most of the time their husband had been in a violent situation with his children and 67.5% as well to his relatives. On top of this, the frequent emotionality of throwing objects during anger feelings accounted to be 55.7%. About the reaction of wives during husband`s beating, 49.5% of the respondents said they defend themselves. Besides, 97.4% of the respondents said they didn`t call police when they are in a problem with their husbands. Also, 91.1% of the respondents explained their violent induced behavior on their children and friends didn`t change due to the violent situation of their husband. Regarding the legal measures taken against the violent act of the husband, 97.6% of the respondents answered “no”.

3.5. Simple Linear Regression Results and Discussions

In the simple linear regression analysis variables such as women education, motivation, and involvement in business were found positively significant determinants for women household decision makings. On the other hand age, district, and occupation were found insignificant.

Table4. Simple linear regression analysis of women`s household decision makings

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-test	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.082	1.563		1.332	.184
District	-.156	.191	-.049	-.818	.414
Age	.006	.018	.019	.356	.722
Education	.277	.138	.116	2.012	.045
Occupation	-.086	.168	-.030	-.510	.610
engaged in business	1.672	.389	.246	4.300	.000
Motivation	.131	.027	.271	4.897	.000

The benefits of investing in girls` education have been recognized for decades(17). That is women`s participation in decision-making increases with education. This variable is found as a significant determinant for women`s household decision makings. This finding is in line with studies conducted in other Asian and African countries including Ethiopia (1, 5, 15, 18). On the other hand, women who are employed for cash are more likely than women not employed for cash to participate in decision-making(1). Besides, women`s participation in decisions about all aspects (own health care, major decisions, daily needs and family visit) is positively associated with working for cash(5). In this study, women`s involvement in business was found statistically significant determinant for the women`s household decisions. A study conducted in India also revealed that the women`s household decision making ability and strategic decisions can be achieved through strengthening them by improving the access of women to credit and their participation in income generating activities(19). Motivation refers to an initiation aspiring to realize goals. It might be linked with a self-confidence and determination one can have. In this study positive association was found between general motivation of the women and their household decision-making status.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

A significant number of husbands decide without involving their wife`s including the women`s own health care. Especially women`s involvement in making major decisions and large household purchases such as land renting, house building, purchasing cattle is insignificant. Besides, women`s perception with regard to their right was also found weak. The majority of the participants believed that the wife should tolerate being beaten by her husband to keep the family together. Similarly, many husbands strictly follow the money that their wife`s spent, get them into forced sex, and beat their wife. Women education, motivation, and involvement in business were found positively significant determinants for women`s household decision makings.

Thus, based on the findings it is recommended to implement both sexes focused sustainable and tailor made capacity building programs to enhance the women's assertiveness and decision makings; and undertake comprehensive community mobilization programs to minimize the prevalence of domestic violence.

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