

Decision making power among women in joint and nuclear families

■ NEERU SHARMA, MUZAMIL JAN, FARHAT MASOODI AND IFFAT GHANI

Received: 26.11.2013; Revised: 12.02.2014; Accepted: 20.02.2014

See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

Correspondence to :

NEERU SHARMA
Department of Home Science,
University of Jammu,
JAMMU (J&K) INDIA

■ **ABSTRACT** : Women's decision making power is influenced by various socio-cultural factors, religion and their education, employment, marital structure and type of family. The present study highlights the women's decision making power as per their family type. The sample of 100 married women was taken for the study through multistage sampling method. Questionnaire was administered along with a scale regarding "Decision Making Power among Women" constructed by Jan (2004). The study reveals highly significant differences among women in joint and nuclear families regarding decisions for control on unnatural abortions and visit to friends.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Women, Decision making power, Family type, Fertility, Empowerment

■ **HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER** : Sharma, Neeru, Jan, Muzamil, Masoodi, Farhat and Ghani, Iffat (2014). Decision making power among women in joint and nuclear families. *Asian J. Home Sci.*, 9 (1) : 29-34.

One of the indicators of status of women in family is whether she is given a share in the decision making process. The important objectives of the feminist movement has been to remove various external barriers to equally influence and participate in decision making by women in working life, in family, in organisation and in public life (Menon, 1989). 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. Coming from outside, the working daughter-in-law may not share the same bond as the son or her husband with the joint family. The women today, whether employed or just housewives are becoming aware of their status as individuals, when they start asserting their rights, they meet with resistances from traditional minded in-laws and husband, other tactfully let their husbands know what they need and how they feel about things. In nuclear family units, the husbands find it relatively easy to yield to some of their demands. In a joint family, however, it may be

difficult to accommodate such needs, even when one wishes because of subtle pressures exercised by other members of the family (Rao, 1982). According to Mumtaz and Aysha (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. Ummet (1987) indicated that the participation of women in family production and her responsibility has increased in those families where the man leaves, which is associated to a smaller size of land, to the formation of large families and the decrease of employment opportunities in agricultural activities. Kumari (1998) found that women in decision making as related to family building process, is important. Greater participation of women in decision-making remained great step towards ensuring women voluntary motherhood and inurn improve their status. Balanc (2001) used assessed women's decision making attitudes and behaviour regarding family size and family planning. He found that

decision-making regarding reproductive matters rarely involves only one person, although in the end one partner wishes may prevail. Decisions on family size and fertility regulation are made within the household, linking basis of power between husbands and wives, resulting communication processes and decision making outcomes.

Objectives of the study:

The present study was conducted with following objectives:

- To find the involvement of women in decision-making process in joint and nuclear families.
- To assess the women's decision-making power related to their fertility, child rearing practices and empowerment.

Rationale of study:

Women play great role in over all development and progress of the nation. But their participation in different fields either directly or indirectly is 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 was undertaken to highlight the areas where women lag behind in their decision making power.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted on 100 married women in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir state. The tool used for the present study comprised 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' means where husband and wife jointly take decisions. 'Feminine' means where decisions are taken only by a women or female members of the family. 'Masculine' means where decisions are taken only by husband or male members of the family. 'Familial' means where decisions are taken by parents in-laws and/or grand parents in the family. 'Non-specific' means where the decisions are 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.

The data collected were coded, scored and analyzed through the software namely, SPSS, computing percentages,

χ^2 -value, degrees of freedom, and levels of significance. Levels of significance were obtained at the p-values of ≤ 0.01 , ≤ 0.05 and > 0.05 . The p-value of < 0.01 is regarded as highly significant. The p-value < 0.05 is considered significant, the p-values of > 0.05 is calculated as insignificant. The reliability of the scale regarding Decision-making power among women was tested for its validity in J & K and was found reliable by 91 per cent 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 was divided into three levels *i.e.*, low medium, high. Low levels of decision making power means the decision taken up to 50 per cent by the women in the family (*i.e.*, scoring < 107 on the scale). The decision taken up to 50-70 per cent by the women (*i.e.*, scoring 107-152 on the scale) is 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 $> 152-215$ on the scale) is regarded as high level of decision making power.

Women's involvement in decision-making power:

Table 1 shows that woman in joint families generally possess low level of egalitarian decision making power and only 5.00 per cent women in nuclear families possessed medium level of decision making power. Such differences in decision making power of women were found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 3.069 with 1 degree of freedom. The differences in masculine decision making power and family type were also found insignificant (p-value of > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 3.061 with 1 degree of freedom. It was observed from the same table that 88.33 per cent women possessed low level of power for participation in familial decision making in joint. Majority of women belonging to nuclear families also possessed low decision making power for participation in familial decision making. However, such differences in decision making power among women and their family type were found insignificant (p-value of > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 5.01 with 2 degree of freedom. It was further observed that 72.50 per cent women possessed low level of power for participation in non-specific decision making in nuclear families. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in non-specific decision making and their family type were found insignificant (p-value of > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 5.54 with 2 degree of freedom. Jan (2004) also found that women enjoy a very low egalitarian and feminine decision making power in family.

Women's decision-making power related to their fertility:

Table 2 shows that 61 per cent of women belonging to joint families possessed feminine decision-making power for participation in family planning. It was observed that 75 per cent of women belonging to nuclear families also possessed feminine decision-making power for participation

in family planning. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in family planning and their family type were found insignificant at (p-value > 0.05) at χ^2 value of 10.13 with 4 degree of freedom. According to Hollander (2006), women's sex reported decision-making role was positively associated with the likelihood that a couple had a plan for addressing emergency during pregnancy, delivery and the postpartum period. For every point that a woman scored on the decision-making index, her odds of this outcome increased by 32 per cent.

It is obvious from Table 2 that 78.3 per cent women belonging to joint families possessed feminine decision-making power for participation in birth control measures; whereas, only 1.66 per cent women hold egalitarian decision making power for participation in birth control measures. About 75 per cent women belonging to nuclear families also possessed feminine decision-making power for participation in birth control measures, whereas, only 10 per cent women hold masculine decision-making power for participation in birth control measures. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in birth control

measures and their family type were found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 3.07 with 4 degree of freedom. Accordingly it is observed from Table 2 that 61.66 per cent women belonging to joint families possessed familial decision-making power for participation in control on unnatural abortions. It was also found that 50 per cent women belonging to nuclear families possessed non-specific decision-making power for participation in control on unnatural abortions; whereas, only 15.00 per cent women hold feminine decision making power for participation in control on unnatural abortions. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in control on unnatural abortions and their family type, were found highly significant (p-value < 0.01) at the χ^2 of 12.70 with 8 degree of freedom. Webster (1990), found that decision-making around sex selective abortion was complex and with joint families increasingly giving way to nuclear families it was possible that decision-making patterns were undergoing a change. As more women enter the job market, it is possible that they will exercise greater choice.

Decision-making power	Family type				Total	Per cent	χ^2 value
	Joint		Nuclear				
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent			
Egalitarian							
Low	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Middle	-	-	-	-	-	-	
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Feminine							
Low	60	100.00	38	95.00	98	98.00	3.069 ₁
Middle	-	-	2	5.00	2	2.00	*
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Masculine							
Low	60	100.00	38	95.00	98	98.00	3.061 ₁
Middle	-	-	2	5.00	2	2.00	*
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Familial							
Low	53	88.33	40	100.00	93	93.00	5.018 ₂
Middle	6	10.00	-	-	6	6.00	*
High	1	1.66	-	-	1	1.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Non-specific							
Low	51	85.00	29	72.50	80	80.00	
Middle	6	10.00	3	7.50	9	9.00	5.54 ₂ *
High	3	5.00	8	20.00	11	11.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage, * indicate significance of value at P=0.05
The degree of freedom as subscripts χ^2 value

Decision-making power	Family type				Total	Per cent	χ^2 value
	Joint		Nuclear				
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent			
Family planning							
Egalitarian	3	5.00	-	-	3	3.00	
Feminine	37	61.66	30	75.00	67	67.00	10.137 ₄
Masculine	15	25.00	3	7.50	18	18.00	*
Familial	-	-	2	5.00	2	2.00	
Non-specific	5	8.30	5	12.50	10	10.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Birth control measures							
Egalitarian	1	1.66	-	-	1	1.00	
Feminine	47	78.33	30	75.00	77	77.00	
Masculine	5	8.33	4	10.00	9	9.00	3.078 ₄ *
Familial	2	3.33	-	-	2	2.00	
Non-specific	5	8.33	6	15.00	11	11.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Control on unnatural abortions							
Egalitarian	2	3.33	-	-	2	2.00	
Feminine	3	5.00	6	15.00	9	9.00	12.70 ₈ *
Masculine	2	3.33	2	5.00	4	4.00	**
Familial	37	61.66	12	30.00	49	49.00	
Non-specific	16	26.6	20	50.00	36	36.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage, * and *** indicate significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively, The degree of freedom as subscripts χ^2 value

Women's decision-making power related to their children:

Table 3 shows that 38.33 per cent women belonging to joint families possessed egalitarian decision-making power for participation in health and care of children, whereas, only 6.66 per cent, women hold familial decision-making power for participation in health and care of children. The table also shows that 42.50 per cent women belonging to nuclear families possessed non-specific, decision-making power for participation in health and care of children, whereas, only 5 per cent, women hold familial decision-making power for participation in health and care of children. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in health and care of children and their family type were found in significant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 8.84 with 4 degree of freedom. Goode (1974) examined that although decisions of women health care are vital to the health and well being of children, in many households, notably in countries like South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, women have little influence in health related matters. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Mizeria, for example almost 75 per cent of women reported that their husband alone make decision on their access to health care services. The exclusive of women from

these crucial decisions can influence the health and well being of all family members particularly children.

It was also observed from Table 3 that 48.33 per cent women belonging to joint families possessed familial decision-making power for education of children, whereas, only 13.33 per cent women possess feminine decision-making power for education of children. Similarly 40.00 per cent women belonging to nuclear families, possessed non-specific decision-making power for education of children, whereas, only 5.00 per cent women hold masculine decision-making power for participation in education of children. Such differences in decision-making power among women for education of children and their family type is found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 9.38 with 4 decrease freedom. David *et al.* (2005) also found that in joint families' females mothers are given negligible importance in deciding educational status of their children.

Table 3 also depicts that 50.00 per cent women from joint families possessed masculine decision-making power in marriage of their children. About 37.5 per cent women from nuclear families possessed familial decision-making power for participation in marriage of children. Such differences in decision making power among women were found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 5.80 with 3 degree of freedom. Roelofe *et al.* (2005) observed that decisions related to marriage of the children have vast variation in joint and nuclear families. In most cases, the marriage of the children is decided by the male members of the family. In older days, the grand parents were given more importance in deciding the marriage of children and children's choice were given least importance, but reverse is the case in present time.

Women's decision - making power related to their empowerment:

Table 4 shows that 33.3 per cent women from joint families possessed familial decision-making power for participation in local government, whereas, only 1.6 per cent women had feminine decision-making power for participation in local government. About 37.5 per cent women from nuclear families possessed non-specific decision-making power for participation in local government, whereas, only 5.00 per cent women had feminine decision making power for participation in local government. Such variations in decision-making power among women for participation in local government were found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 5.62 with 4 degree of freedom. Doyle *et al.* (1985) stressed removal of gender gap caused by discrimination, motivation and disparities in state between women and men. However, women still continue to be less advantaged than men in terms of rights and opportunities, access to resources services benefits and decision-making. It was also observed from Table 4 that 36.6 per cent women from joint families possessed masculine

Table 3: Women's decision-making power related to their children							
Decision-making power	Family type				Total	Per cent	χ^2 value
	Joint		Nuclear				
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent			
Health of children							
Egalitarian	23	38.33	11	27.50	34	34.00	8.846 ₄ *
Feminine	16	26.66	7	17.50	23	23.00	
Masculine	7	11.66	3	7.50	10	10.90	
Familial	4	6.66	2	5.00	6	6.00	
Non-specific	10	16.66	17	42.50	27	27.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Education of children							
Egalitarian	-	-	3	7.50	3	3.00	9.389 ₄ *
Feminine	8	13.33	6	15.00	14	14.00	
Masculine	8	13.33	2	5.00	10	10.00	
Familial	29	48.33	13	32.50	42	42.00	
Non-specific	15	25.00	16	40.00	31	31.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Marriage of children							
Egalitarian	6	10.00	10	25.00	35	35.00	5.804 ₃ *
Feminine	4	6.66	13	32.50	12	12.00	
Masculine	30	50.00	12	30.00	7	7.00	
Familial	20	33.33	15	37.50	16	16.00	
Non-specific	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage * and indicate significance of value at P=0.05
The degree of freedom as subscripts χ^2 value

decision-making power for participation in choice for generating activity, whereas only 6.6 per cent women hold egalitarian decision-making power for choice in income generating activity. It is obvious that 22.5 per cent women belonging to nuclear families possessed masculine decision-

making power for choice for generating activity, whereas only 2.30 per cent women hold egalitarian decision-making power for choice in income generating activity. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in choice generating activity and their family were found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 13.40 with 4 degree of freedom.

Table 4 also shows that 38.8 per cent women belonging to joint families possessed familial decision-making power for visit to relatives, whereas only 6.66 per cent women had feminine decision-making power for visit to relatives. About 35.00 per cent women from nuclear families possessed non-specific decision-making power for visit to relatives, whereas only 6.66 per cent women had feminine decision-making power for participation for visit to relatives. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation in visit to relatives were found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 5.80 with 4 degree of freedom. About 33.03 per cent women from joint families possessed masculine decision-making power for participation in visit to friends; where as only 5.00 per cent women have feminine decision-making power for visit to friends. About 35.00 per cent women from nuclear families possessed non-specific decision-making power for visit to friends, whereas only 2.25 per cent women had feminine decision-making power for participation for visit to friends. Such differences in decision-making power among women for participation for visit to friends and their family type were found highly significant (p-value <0.01) at the χ^2 value of 13.17 with 4 degree of freedom.

Table 4 depicts that 58.03 per cent women belonging to joint families possessed familial decision-making power for sale and purchase of property, whereas only 5.00 per cent women had masculine decision-making power for sale and purchase of property. It was observed that 45 per cent women from nuclear families possessed non-specific decision-making power for sale and purchase of property, whereas only 2.2 per cent women had egalitarian decision making power for participation in sale and purchase of property. Such difference in decision-making power among women for participation in sale and purchase of property was found insignificant (p-value > 0.05) at the χ^2 value of 14.03 with 4 degree of freedom. Elizabeth (2003) found that equal land and property rights represent a significant step towards eliminating gender discrimination at the household levels. National legal reforms in property law and inheritance rights represent one of the most direct strategies for increasing women's access to land and 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 women so that they

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

Decision-making power	Family type				Total	Per cent	χ^2 value
	Joint		Nuclear				
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent			
Participation in local government							
Egalitarian	4	6.66	6	15.00	10	10.00	5.628 ₄ *
Feminine	1	1.66	2	5.00	3	3.00	
Masculine	18	30.00	10	25.00	28	28.00	
Familial	20	33.33	7	17.05	27	27.00	
Non-specific	17	28.33	15	37.05	32	32.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Choice for undertaking income generating activity							
Egalitarian	4	6.66	13	32.5	17	17.00	13.40 ₄ *
Feminine	6	10.00	5	12.50	11	11.00	
Masculine	22	36.06	9	22.50	31	31.00	
Familial	16	26.06	5	12.50	21	21.00	
Non-specific	12	20.00	8	20.00	20	20.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Visit to relatives							
Egalitarian	5	8.03	5	12.05	10	10.00	5.802 ₄ *
Feminine	4	6.66	4	10.00	8	8.00	
Masculine	15	25.00	10	25.00	28	28.00	
Familial	23	38.03	7	17.05	30	30.00	
Non-specific	13	21.06	14	35.00	27	27.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Visit to friends							
Egalitarian	5	8.03	10	25.00	15	15.00	13.17 ₄ *
Feminine	3	5.00	1	2.25	4	4.00	
Masculine	20	33.03	9	22.05	29	29.00	
Familial	12	20.00	6	15.00	28	28.00	
Non-specific	10	16.66	14	35.00	24	24.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	
Sale and purchase of property							
Egalitarian	5	8.33	1	2.25	6	6.00	14.03 ₄ *
Feminine	6	10.00	5	12.05	11	11.00	
Masculine	3	5.00	5	12.05	8	8.00	
Familial	35	58.03	11	27.05	46	46.00	
Non-specific	11	18.03	18	45.00	29	29.00	
Total	60	100.00	40	100.00	100	100.00	

Column percentage, * and *** indicate significance of value at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively. The degree of freedom as subscripts χ^2 value

can rear up their children in a better way and solve their day to day problems for achieving their desired goals. Women in joint and nuclear families mainly hold low egalitarian and feminine decision-making power. Women in nuclear mainly hold feminine decision making power related to family planning, birth control measures and control on unnatural abortions. Women in joint families mainly possess egalitarian decision-making power related to their health and children and familial decision-making power related to their education of children. Women in joint families also possess masculine decision making power related to their marriage of children. However, women in nuclear families possess non-specific decision-making power and women in joint families possess masculine decision making power for participation in local government. Women in nuclear families mainly possess egalitarian decision making power women in joint families hold masculine decision-making power in choice for income generating activity. Women in joint families possess familial decision-making power for visit to their relatives. Where as women in nuclear families mainly hold masculine decision-making power for visit to relatives. Women in joint families also possess familial decision-making power for sale and purchase of property; where as, women in nuclear families hold non-specific decision making power for sale and purchase of property. Man and women are the two faces of the same coin and if they work together and are given equal powers, the world will definitely be a better place to live in.

Authors' affiliations:

MUZAMIL JAN, FARHAT MASOODI AND IFFAT GHANI, Department of Home Science, University of Jammu, JAMMU (J&K) INDIA
Email: masoodi.farhat@yahoo.com

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