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**Address: - Ashak Hussain Malik House No. 221 Gangoo, Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, India - 192301, Cell: 09086405302, 09906662570, Ph. No: 01933-212815, Email: [nairjc5@gmail.com](mailto:nairjc5@gmail.com) Website: [www.nairjc.com](http://www.nairjc.com)**

# Determinants of Women's Empowerment Level in North-East Africa: A Focus on Three Domains of Empowerment.

ASABE IBRAHIM

PhD Scholar, Department of Statistics, Banaras Hindu University, 221005-Varanasi India.

E-mail Id: [asabeibrahim@gmail.com](mailto:asabeibrahim@gmail.com)

## 1. Abstract

A multi-dimensional study of measures/domain provides an alternative ways through which women's empowerment can be viewed and understood and how each measure/domain contributes to enhancing the empowerment of women in North-Eastern Africa. In this study, Nigeria is the study population where we and examined women's empowerment level in the household setting using three domains that is directly related to issues pertaining the position of women in the household. The strength of each of these domains was examined through some indicators that point out how well they contribute to the empowerment of women in the study area. Statistical analysis was applied to data from the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2008. Results obtained revealed that there is a low participation of women in household decision-making, high disagreement to domestic violence and low level of empowerment.

Keywords: domain, empowerment, NDHS, decision-making, logistic regression.

## 2. Introduction

Women empowerment has become one of the major issue of concern in developing countries, Nawaz, F. (2009). The level of women's empowerment is relative to the measuring variable used, and the measure influences how we understand it, how we analyse it and how we use it for policy formulation and implementation. In most African countries, women constitute a very significant and indispensable portion of the population and that is why recently women have come to a definite focus because of the realization of what the nations might be missing by not involving them in the developmental process of the nations. Several researchers (Rathgeber, E. M. (1990); Matland, R. E. (1998); Malhotra, A., & Schuler, S. R. (2005)), have emphasised on the importance of empowering women for National development, however, such empowerment can only be achieved by focusing first on the women's position in the household, that is how well she can take a decision in household matters; her position in the community, as well as the society as a whole.

Asaju and Adagba (2013) said in one of their studies that the progress and development of any nation are contributed by the women in the society. As such women can be seen as a tool for positive change, depending on how well they are treated and the level of opportunities given to them to actualise their potentials.

Even though women's empowerment is a complex construct, which has no universally acceptable definition or agreement regarding which domains and sub-domains comprise one's empowerment, Cunningham et al (2015). Nevertheless, literatures such as Kabeer (1999), Malhotra et al. (2002), Alsop & Heinsohn (2005), Alsop et al.(2006) and Samman & Santos (2009) referred to women's empowerment as the notions of power, agency, control and decision making. However, Kabeer in his study (1999) defines empowerment as a process, namely, 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied'. In line with Kabeer's definition of empowerment, and for the purpose of this study, we viewed women's empowerment as women's ability to independently or jointly participate in domestic decision making pertaining to their lives and family in order to improve their social and economic status and for the family's well-being.

This study uses three selected domains to measure the levels of women's empowerment in Nigeria. These domains are; domestic decision making, domestic violence and refusing sexual intercourse and each domain has indicators that are used to measure the extent of their participation in some

domestic decisions or domestic violence or justifying refusing sexual intercourse. Kabeer (2005) said decision-making power of women is one of the elements required to enable one gain power, authority and influence over others, institutions or society.

## 2.1. Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to examine with the help of NDHS 2008 data, the level of women's empowerment in Nigeria by exploring three domains of empowerment and women's socio and demographic characteristics.

## 3. Methodology.

Three domains of women's empowerment were selected to measure the level of women's empowerment in the study area. These domains are women's domestic decision-making autonomy (DDM), women's attitude towards domestic violence (DV) and women's attitude towards refusing sexual intercourse with husband (RS). The selection of these domains as a measure of women's empowerment is because of the availability of information in the study areas and its relatedness to women's empowerment.

### Domestic Decision Making (DDM)

Domestic decision-making autonomy was measured by asking women who makes decision on some issues of great importance in the household, such as; use of contraceptive, own health care, major purchases, purchases for daily household needs, visit to family or relatives and money earned by husband. There are four response options for the first question (mainly respondent, mainly husband/partner alone, jointly decision, other). While for the remaining questions five questions are six response options (respondent alone, respondent and spouse/partner, respondent and other person, husband/partner alone, someone else, other).

Responses were categorized into two groups, where women responded participating in each decision making either alone or with husband or other persons; we give code 1 indicating having decision-making autonomy and if she responded not taking part in any decision, we code 0 showing no decision autonomy.

### Domestic violence (DV)

Attitude of women towards domestic violence (specifically wife beating) was also examined by asking the women whether it is justified for husbands to beat or hit their wives for each of the following reasons: if she goes out without telling him, she disrespect him, she neglect the children, she refuse to have sex with him or she does

not cook properly. For each of the given questions, there are two responses (Yes or No). A respondent who said 'Yes' to a question indicates that they justify wife beating while those who said 'No' do not justify wife beating. Yes and No responses are given codes 0 and one respectively for the purpose of analysis. Higher score on the number of reasons for wife beating justified indicates women's greater sense of entitlement, self-esteem and status, which reflects positively on their sense of empowerment (Gender factsheet-2010)

### **Refusing Sexual Intercourse (RS)**

This domain of empowerment was measured using three questions adopted from DHS. Women were asked for their opinion on refusing sexual intercourse with their husbands or partners under the following conditions: if the husband has sexually transmitted (STD) disease, if he has other women or if she is tired or not in the mood. Each the questions has two responses – Yes (1) or No (0). Respondent who answered yes is supporting or justifying women's refusal of sexual intercourse with their husbands/ spouse under any/all of the given conditions, while the response no indicates that women do not justify refusing sexual intercourse under any of the conditions. A high score on these variables indicates a high level of empowerment.

However, the rationale behind using these three indicators to measure women's empowerment in this study is merely based on the assumption that women who participate in making domestic decisions in the household are more likely to have unrestricted beliefs about gender roles, and are liable to disapprove the practice of domestic violence against women and to support a woman's right to refuse sexual relation with her husband for the given reasons (NBS and ICF Macro, 2011). They are the only common indicators that are directly pointing to women's empowerment and are more related to women's right/autonomy and have consequences for women's being and health.

Consequently, the argument here is that empowered women who have control over choices in their life and has greater self-worth and power, will not justify domestic violence perpetrated against women for any reason. On the other hand, a woman who justifies domestic violence lacks control and power in her life and is bound by the constraints of gendered power structures and therefore not empowered in this domain.

## Women's empowerment level

The levels of women's empowerment were determined from the percentage scores obtained by combining the three domains of empowerment alongside their indicators. The high percentage score means high empowerment and a low score means low empowerment.

### 4. Results:

#### 4.1. Domestic decision making

Table 1 present the percentage distribution of the background characteristics of women in Nigeria with the selected domains of empowerment alongside with their empowerment status. The results revealed that women's socio-demographic characteristics have a direct association with the three areas and hence their empowerment. It can be observed from the result that woman's domestic decision-making autonomy increases directly proportional to their age, age at marriage, age at first birth, education, wealth status and partner's age. However, we observe from Table 1 that women with spousal education and age gap  $\leq 5$  years have more domestic decision-making autonomy. The results also showed that urban women and women with parity 0 – 2 children have a higher proportion of decision-making autonomy.

Table 2 gives the results on the distribution of each indicator of the three domains of empowerment. We observe from the result that women have very low domestic decision-making autonomy in the use of contraceptive but higher autonomy on a visit to family or relative and daily household purchases. This is possibly because decisions on when, how and the husband mostly determines number of children in an ideal African society, and most often, women are free to decide what to purchase and cook daily, and also when to visit her relatives.

Table 3 presents the distribution of the domains of empowerment with their indicators showing percentage participation on each indicator. The result revealed that only 23.4% of women participate in making at least five decisions in their households, while 48.6% participate in making at most one decision. Table 4 present results from logistic regression giving the values of odds ratio and confidence interval. The result revealed that women's age, age at first marriage, their educational status, place of residence as well as wealth status has a significant impact on women's domestic decision-making autonomy.

## 4.2 Domestic violence.

Women's attitudes towards wife beating were accessed by asking if they if it is justified for husbands to hit or beat their wives for five given reasons. The results obtained showed that the proportion of acceptance of this norm decreased with increase in age, age at marriage, age at first birth, educational status, and wealth status. However, women in urban areas, those with parity more than two, and whose spousal education and age gap is  $\leq 5$  years have less percentage of justifying domestic violence than their other counterparts as can be seen in Table 1. Furthermore, over 60% of women do not justify domestic violence in each of the five indicators considered, where very high percentage (82.1%) is observed for the indicator 'if she do not cook properly' as presented in Table 2. Similarly, results of Table 3 revealed that more than 50% of women do not justify domestic violence in all given situations, only 13.3% of them justified domestic violence in four of the cases.

Results from logistic regression given in Table 4 revealed that women's justification for domestic violence is not significant with some background characteristics like age at marriage, partner's age and partner's education. The result showed that women's age and age at first birth more than 25 years were 16 and 26 percent respectively less likely to justify domestic violence, while urban women, with spousal age/education gap  $> 5$  years were observed to be 50 and 19 percent respectively more likely to justify domestic violence by husbands. Additionally, women in the rich status were 22% less likely to justify domestic violence than their poor counterparts as given in Table 5.

## 4.3 Refusing sexual intercourse.

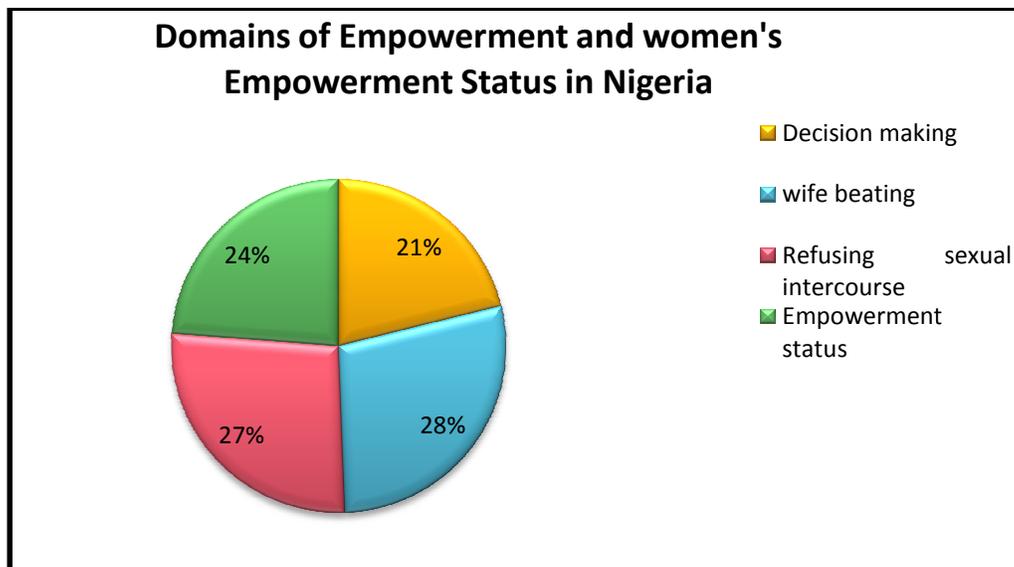
The third domain of women's empowerment considered in this study is the attitudes of women towards refusing sexual intercourse with their partners under some given indicators. Results obtained revealed that this domain of empowerment has a relationship with women's background characteristics as can be seen in Table 1. Table 2 showed that over 60% of women justify that it is right for women to refuse sex under all the given situations, but the percentage of justification is high (82.2) percent if husband has STD. Table 3 also revealed higher proportion of women (44.9) percent justified refusing sexual intercourse in all the situations while 11.4% ultimately do not justify refusing sexual intercourse in any of the given conditions. Results from logistic regression revealed that women's attitude of refusing sex is only significant with place of residence and wealth status, where women living in urban areas were found to be 24% more likely to justify refusing sexual intercourse than their rural counterpart. Similarly, women in the rich wealth status were 7% more likely to justify refusing sexual intercourse than those in the poor wealth status.

#### 4.4 Empowerment status

The women's empowerment status was examined through the three domains of empowerment discussed earlier. Here, a higher percentage of empowerment place the women on the high empowerment level and lower percentage place them on low empowerment level as presented in Table 1.

The figure below shows the proportion of currently married women who participate in all household decision making, do not justify domestic violence in all the five reasons, justify refusing sexual intercourse for all the three reasons and those who are empowered based on the three selected domains considered in the study.

Figure1.



#### 4. Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the level of women's empowerment in Nigeria using three domains together with their indicators. Statistical analysis was carried out on the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey data, where we considered only information on the currently married women at the time of the survey. Findings from the study revealed that women's socio-economic status and demographic characteristics has significant contribution to their empowerment. Additionally, the study revealed that women's decision making autonomy in their households has greatly influenced their empowerment level much more than the other two domains of empowerment. Finally, the study revealed that women in the study have low level of empowerment as far as the domains considered are concern. However, using additional or other domains to measure empowerment level might yield better or ultimately different results. Furthermore, adding or removing some of the women's background characteristics can also place the women on different level of empowerment.

## 5. Acknowledgement.

We gratefully appreciate the measure DHS for allowing us download the data used in the study. This made it easier for us to obtain certain information on women on different issues of their lives.

## Appendix.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>DDM</b>	<b>DV</b>	<b>RS</b>	<b>WES</b>
<b>Age Of Respondent</b>				
15-24	31.1	48.1	41.1	39.9
25-34	45.6	40.5	45.8	50.7
35-49	49.1	39.3	46.3	54.3
<b>Age At First Marriage</b>				
15-24	47.4	40.3	47.1	52.9
25-34	63.5	27.1	51.0	65.0
35-49	77.4	30.1	51.6	72.0
<b>Age At First Birth</b>				
15-24	43.4	42.7	45.6	49.8
25-34	58.3	30.0	49.4	60.1
35-49	55.2	28.1	50.0	57.3
<b>Partner's age</b>				
Below 40years	42.4	42.4	44.8	48.5
Above 40 Years	44.6	41.3	44.9	50.4
<b>Respondent Level Of Education</b>				
No Education	26.6	48.6	38.0	35.8
Primary	54.9	43.9	48.8	60.2
Secondary/Higher	66.0	27.6	54.5	66.6
<b>Partners Level Of Education</b>				
No Education	25.9	48.2	37.1	34.8
Primary	51.8	43.8	47.5	57.1
Secondary/higher	59.0	52.1	55.2	60.4
<b>Spousal Age Gap</b>				
Up To 5 Years	53.5	38.2	48.2	58.4
More Than 5 Years	39.8	43.0	43.8	46.3
<b>Spousal education gap</b>				
< 5 Years	63.3	33.0	53.2	65.4
5+ Years	53.4	43.7	48.7	58.8
<b>Residence</b>				
Urban	53.4	31.2	48.7	56.0
Rural	39.6	45.9	43.4	47.0
<b>Wealth status</b>				
Poor	30.7	48.6	38.7	38.9
Middle	47.0	45.8	48.3	55.3
Rich	60.7	29.3	52.2	62.1
<b>Parity</b>				
0 - 2 Children	46.5	40.0	45.8	51.7
More Than 2 Children	31.5	49.2	41.4	40.9
<b>Working status</b>				

No. of indicator	DDM (Yes)	DV (No)	RSI (Yes)	Total
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
0	8621 (36.0)	12297 (51.3)	2738 (11.4)	23656 (44.9)
1	3011 (12.6)	2194 (9.2)	4205 (17.6)	9410 (39.3)
2	1967 (8.2)	2253 (9.4)	6265 (26.2)	10485 (43.8)
3	1926 (8.0)	2157 (9.0)	10746 (44.9)	14829 (61.9)
4	2805 (11.7)	1901 (7.9)		4706 (19.6)
5	4921 (20.5)	3152 (13.2)		8073 (33.7)
6	703 (2.9)			703 (2.9)

Domain	Indicator	Number	%
Domestic Decision Making autonomy (yes responses)	Contraceptive use	2243	9.4
	Own health care	10100	42.2
	Large HH purchase	8908	37.2
	Daily HH purchase	11439	47.8
	Visit to family	12887	53.8
	Husband's earnings	7189	30.0
<b>Average number of women who participate in decision making</b>		<b>8794</b>	<b>36.73</b>
Domestic Violence (No responses)	If she goes out without permission	15016	62.7
	If she neglect the children	15753	65.8
	If she argues with him	16536	69.0
	If she refuse to have sex with him	16480	68.8
	If she does not cook properly	19450	81.2
<b>Average number of women who do not justify wife beating in at least one area</b>		<b>16647</b>	<b>69.50</b>
Refusing Sexual Relation (yes responses)	If husband has STD	19702	82.2
	If he has other women	14630	61.1
	If she is tired or not in the mood	14641	61.1
<b>Average number of women who justify refusing sexual intercourse in at least one situation</b>		<b>16324</b>	<b>68.13</b>
<b>3 domains</b>		<b>14 indicators</b>	<b>58.1</b>

<b>Table 4. Logistic Regression Of 3 Indicators Of Empowerment And Some Socio -Demographic Variables For Currently Married Women in Nigeria</b>				
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Domestic decision Making Autonomy (Yes)</b>	<b>Attitudes Towards domestic violence (No)</b>	<b>Attitudes Towards Refusing Sexual Intercourse (yes)</b>	<b>women's Empowerment status</b>
	<b>Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)</b>			
<b>Respondent Age</b>				
< 25 (REF)				
25 and above	1.578***[1.442, 1.726]	0.843***[0.769, 0.925]	1.054[0.968, 1.148]	1.414***[1.292, 1.548]
<b>Age At Marriage</b>				
< 25 (REF)				
25 and above	0.823*[0.692, 0.979]	0.957[0.794, 1.155]	0.939[0.801, 1.102]	0.814**[0.685, 0.967]
<b>Age At 1st Birth</b>				
< 25 (REF)				
25 and above	1.121[0.953, 1.314]	0.738*[0.620, 0.877]	0.981[0.846, 1.137]	1.044[0.888, 1.227]
<b>Partner's Age</b>				
< 40yrs (REF)				
> 40yrs	0.960[0.841, 1.096]	0.985[0.859, 1.130]	1.008[0.890, 1.142]	1.045[0.915, 1.193]
<b>Type Of Residence</b>				
Rural (REF)				
Urban	1.198***[1.198, 1.334]	1.501***[1.342, 1.679]	1.238***[1.119, 1.369]	1.320***[1.185, 1.471]
<b>Respondent Level Of Education</b>				
No Education (REF)				
Primary and higher	1.375***[1.233, 1.533]	0.671***[0.601, 0.749]	1.100[0.992, 1.220]	1.263***[1.132, 1.410]
<b>Partner's Level Of Education</b>				
No Education (REF)				
Primary and higher	0.959[0.858, 1.073]	0.933[0.833, 1.045]	1.079[0.971, 1.199]	0.986[0.881,1.104]
<b>Husband/Wife Age Gap</b>				
Up To 5 Years (Ref)				
More Than 5 Years	0.733***[0.659, 0.816]	1.912***[1.401, 2.609]	0.935[0.846, 1.034]	0.715***[0.642, 0.796]
<b>Husband/Wife Education Gap</b>				
< 5 Years (REF)				
5+ Years	0.657**[0.0.483, 0.895]	1.912***[1.401,2.609]	0.797[0.590, 1.076]	0.768[0.562, 1.049]
<b>Wealth status</b>				
Poor(REF)				
Rich	1.192***[1.112, 1.278]	0.784***[0.731, 0.840]	1.073*[1.004, 1.147]	1.065[0.992, 1.144]

NOTE: \*\*\*p< 0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05 and p not significant REF= Reference category

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