

# Analytic Approach to the Study of Women's Empowerment through Participation in Household Decision-Making in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *Women's rights and autonomy especially at the household level has become a subject of serious concern for researchers all over the globe. Though the concept 'women's autonomy,' is not easy to capture in just a word, sentence or even by definition because of its varying usage and meaning. It may be termed as combinations of financial, political, social, cultural, physiological and sexual decision-making power exercised by the women. It is sometimes referred to as a process of gaining control over their life, body and well-being at a given point in time. It is the ability of the women to gain greater autonomy at a point in time. The study found that women's autonomy in decision making at the household level has direct and significant relationship with their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, such as age, education, wealth status, type of residence, number of children and work status. We can conclude on the basis of this study that large proportion of women does not, or have less participation in most of their household decisions either alone or jointly with their spouse and this lead to their low level of empowerment. The finding from the study leads us not to reject our stated hypothesis.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, autonomy, Nigeria, analytic approach, household.

## 1. Introduction

Human race is a two-winged bird. One wing is female and the other wing is male, unless both wings are equally developed, the human race will not be able to fly steadily. Now more than ever, the cause of women is the cause of mankind. Based on the biological (sex) differences, every society imposed certain rules, regulations, responsibilities, and rights to men and women. Observing these behaviours and practices carefully, we will see that most of these rules and regulations are discriminatory in nature, and thereby creating differences between the two sexes, which in most cases gives a lower status to women in terms of men both socially, culturally, religiously, economically, legally and otherwise.

Nigeria, which is the largest country in Africa, is a democratic country and democracy implies equal opportunities to all citizens and thus also implies gender equality. But in reality, in a patriarchal country like Nigeria, most women lack autonomy and have low status both within the family and the societal setup. The term empowerment/autonomy has received considerable attention in developmental studies since mid 1980s most especially in relation to women. In a similar vein, during the world conference on women in Beijing (1995), priority has been given to empowering women in the developing countries because of the fact status of women has been considered low in these countries. Nigeria is a cosmopolitan country where women's autonomy has great regional variations. Autonomy has multi-dimensional aspects such as civil, political, social, economic, cultural participation and rights, as such measuring the degree of autonomy have to involve several factors to measure. The household or family is the smallest but an important area where women exercise control over their rights, but in most cases this is hindered by gender

inequality at the family level which manifest in the weaker role of women in decision-making in the household.

However, empowerment of women is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Decades ago, the studies of women's empowerment was scanty or minimal, but as time passes by, research in the area continued to grow fast. Today, there are many literatures and studies on women's empowerment, with the majority having its base in the Asian continent.

Women's rights and autonomy especially at the household level has become a subject of serious concern for both researchers and policy makers. Though the concept of women's autonomy is not easy to capture in just a word, sentence or even by definition because of its varying usage. Women's autonomy may be termed as the combinations of financial, political, social, cultural, physiological and sexual decision making power exercised by the women folk. As a matter of fact, women's autonomy is referred to as a process of gaining control over their life, body and well-being at a given point in time. It is the ability of the women to gain greater autonomy at a point in time. This study will explore women's empowerment in relation to their participation in household decision making.

### 1.1 Hypothesis

On the basis of the different literatures reviewed in this study, it is hypothesized that a higher proportion of women does not participate in household decision-making either alone or jointly with their spouse.

## 2. Materials and Methods

For the purpose of this study, we have used a secondary data called the 2008 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2008 NDHS), which was implemented by the National Population Commission (NPC) Nigeria in collaboration with ICF Macro, USAID, PEPFAR and UNPA. The study analysis is based on a sample of 23,954 married women of reproductive age (15 - 49) years from Nigeria, who were present during the periods of the survey. The variables through which women's empowerment was measured is by the help of six questions adopted from the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) on who makes the decisions in the household were used in this study. The respondents were asked who in your family usually has the final say on the following decisions;

- Contraceptive use?
- Your health care?
- Large household purchases?
- Daily household purchases?
- Visits to families or relatives?
- Husband's earnings?

For each of these questions, the women were given the following response options;

- 1) Respondent alone
- 2) Respondent and spouse jointly
- 3) Respondent and someone else jointly
- 4) Husband/spouse alone
- 5) Someone else
- 6) Other

For each of the questions on household decision making, a dichotomous variable was created so as to reflect the pattern of the decision making. For each domain, the variables was given code 1 'if the respondent says she has the final say on the decision alone' and code 0 'if she does not have a final say on the decision'. Similarly, a set of the dichotomous variable was created for each domain on the basis of whether or not the husband/partner has the final say in the decisions. Finally, another set of a dichotomous variable was created for each domain on the basis of whether or not the couple made decisions jointly.

Each of these dichotomous sets was combined as a scale from 0 to 6. These give the total number of domains in which respondent, husband/partner or couple had the final say on household decisions. The background variables (demographic and socio- economic) for assessing the empowerment of women considered for the purpose of this study are; age of respondent, age at marriage, age at first birth, couples age gap, residence, respondent level of education, couples education gap, wealth status, number of children (parity) and work status. In order to know the empowerment level of women in Nigeria, percentage distributions and logistic regression has been carried out to see the relationship of the covariates on household decision making.

## 3. Statistical Analysis

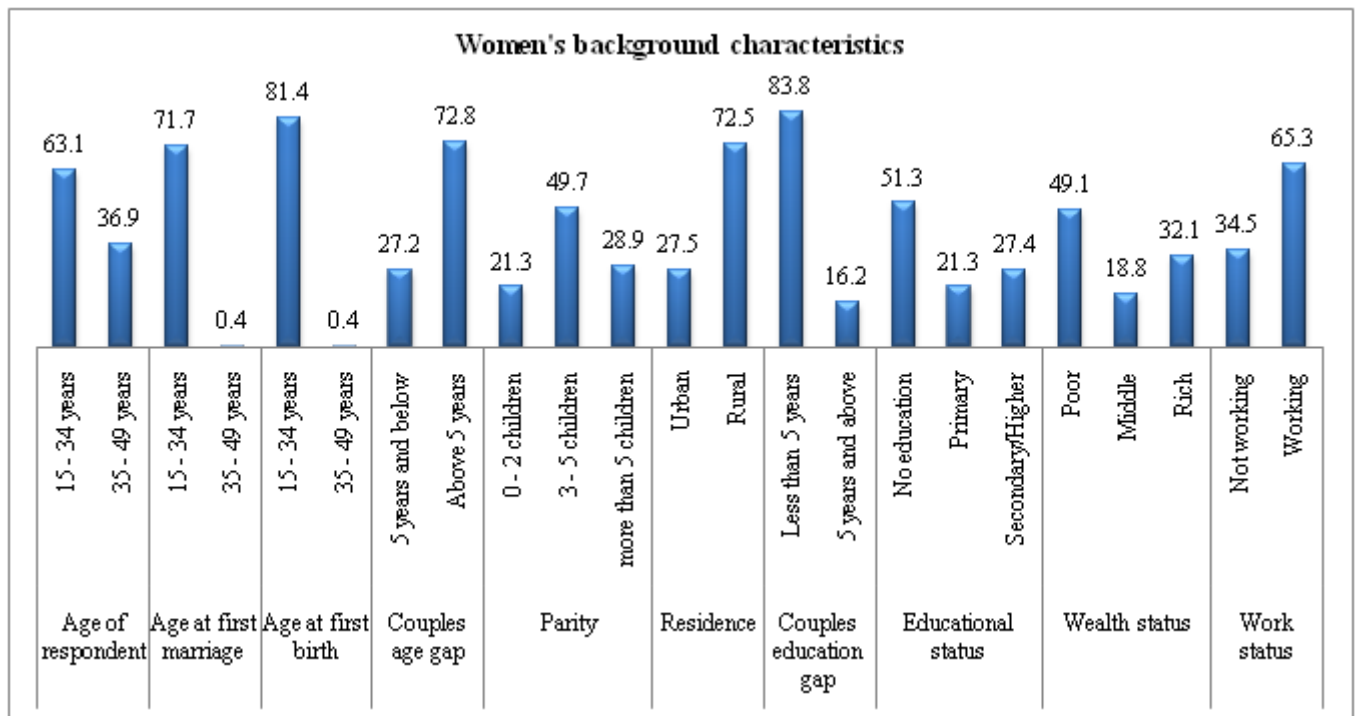
All the analysis in this study was carried out using SPSS for windows version 16.0 and STATA/IC version 12.0. We first carried out the descriptive statistics of the women's background characteristics to have an overview of their frequency and percentage responses according to each of the characteristics. Secondly, percentages of women's participation in each household decision-making variable were also computed with respect to their socio economic and background characteristics. Thirdly, the frequency and percentage of the number of decisions participated by women, men or jointly each was computed to know the proportion of decisions taken by either woman, men or jointly in the household. Fourthly, participation of women, men and jointly in each of the household decision variable was equally computed to know the number and percentage of who participate in making which decision in the household. Finally, a logistic regression was run to know the extent of women's empowerment through their autonomy in making decisions in the household.

## 4. Results and Discussions

Table 1 present the results of the characteristics of the study population considered. Among the total women interviewed, the majority (63.1%) were between the ages 15 – 34 years, (71.7%) of them married between same age range, and 81.4% of them had their first birth below the age of 35 years. More than two third (72.8%) of the women have age gap above 5 years with their partners, about half (49.7%) has between 3 to 5 children, majority (72.5%) of which lives in rural areas. Approximately half of the women were not educated, and only 27.4% of them have attended secondary or higher education, 83.8% of the have less than five years education gap with their partners. Almost half (49.1%) of the women were from a poor background and 65.3% of them are not working. Figure 1 shows this characteristic clearly on the chart.

**Table 1:** Percentage distribution of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of currently married women age (15 - 49) in Nigeria

N = 23954			
Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age of respondent	15 - 34 years	15121	63.1
	35 - 49 years	8833	36.9
Age at first marriage	15 - 34 years	17173	71.7
	35 - 49 years	107	0.4
Age at first birth	15 - 34 years	19500	81.4
	35 - 49 years	96	0.4
Couples age gap	5 years and below	6392	27.2
	Above 5 years	17131	72.8
Parity	0 - 2 children	5112	21.3
	3 - 5 children	11915	49.7
	more than 5 children	6927	28.9
Residence	Urban	6586	27.5
	Rural	17368	72.5
Couples education gap	Less than 5 years	11344	83.8
	5 years and above	2193	16.2
Educational status	No education	12288	51.3
	Primary	5110	21.3
	Secondary/Higher	6556	27.4
Wealth status	Poor	11754	49.1
	Middle	4506	18.8
	Rich	7694	32.1
Work status	Not working	8256	34.5
	Working	15647	65.3



**Figure 1**

Table 2 show the distribution of the percentage of women's participation in decision-making based on each decision-making variable. The result shows that women below the age of 35 years (55.6%) have final say only on their husband's earning, more than those above 35 years (32.3%), but in all other variables women over 35 years of age have a say more than those below 35 years. This is to say that women of higher age participate more in household

decision-making in Nigeria. Higher decision making power with increase in age may be attributed to the cultural norms whereby the newly married women are expected to perform household duties under the supervision of her husband or even mother-in-law who is primarily the decision maker. It can be observed that women with higher age at first marriage and age at first birth has greater participation in almost all the household decisions except in decisions

regarding the use of contraceptive and husband's earnings, which might be attributed to possibly no need to control child bearing at this age and the fact that decisions on husbands earnings is taken jointly by the couples. From Table 2, women with age and education gap of less than five with their partners participated more in making household decisions. Women with 3 to 5 number of children who have

secondary or higher education and are from the urban areas has greater ability to participate in household decision-making as shown clearly in the table. Similarly, women who are from a rich background and are working participate more in decision making.

**Table 2:** Distribution of Decision-making variables by socio-demographic characteristics of women in Nigeria

Socio demographic Characteristics	Final say on contraceptive use	Final say on health care	Final say on large HH purchases	Final say on daily HH purchases	Final say on visit to family/relative	Final say on husband's earnings
<b>Respondent Age</b>						
15 - 34 years	10.2	39.0	34.4	44.3	50.8	55.6
35 - 49 years	13.4	47.6	42.0	53.7	58.9	32.3
<b>Age at first marriage</b>						
15 - 34 years	13.8	47.4	41.9	53.8	58.9	76.9
35 - 49 years	5.6	68.2	62.6	74.8	74.8	50.5
<b>Age at first birth</b>						
15 - 34 years	12.9	43.8	38.6	49.7	55.5	67.9
35 - 49 years	9.4	52.1	46.9	63.5	64.6	37.5
<b>Couples age gap</b>						
<= 5 years	12.3	51.1	45.1	58.1	62.5	36.7
> 5 years and above	8.4	39.0	34.4	44.1	50.8	27.6
<b>Women's parity</b>						
0 - 2 children	8.5	41.1	36.0	45.8	51.9	30.5
3 - 5 children	14.0	44.5	37.9	49.8	56.0	31.3
Above 5 children	12.7	42.3	37.8	48.6	54.5	27.9
<b>Respondents education</b>						
No education	2.9	27.3	24.1	30.5	39.8	21.0
Primary	14.1	52.0	46.4	60.7	63.9	35.0
Secondary/Higher	25.1	62.3	54.4	70.1	72.1	43.1
<b>Couples education gap</b>						
< 5 years	16.7	57.1	50.4	65.6	68.1	39.4
5 years above	4.4	34.5	31.7	40.8	48.2	25.7
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	20.9	52.1	44.1	57.1	61.6	33.8
Rural	7.8	38.4	34.6	44.2	50.8	28.6
<b>Wealth status</b>						
Poor	3.6	30.7	27.7	35.0	43.0	23.2
Middle	9.5	44.8	40.9	51.8	57.9	33.3
Rich	24.4	58.1	49.4	64.9	67.9	38.4
<b>Work status</b>						
Not working	5.9	29.2	26.4	31.9	39.4	23.0
Working	14.3	49.0	42.9	56.2	61.5	33.8

Table 3 gives the distribution of women's autonomy based on the number of decisions the women, their partners or they jointly participate in making in their households. It can be observed from Table 3 that larger percentage (74.6%) and (46.1%) of the women considered in the study does not participate alone in making any of the six household decisions and none of them participate in all six decisions variables considered. It can be clearly seen that about 35.7% of men participate in making five of the household decisions, and only 15.9% of decisions were made jointly by the couples. This indicates based on the result that in general, women in Nigeria has very low participation in household decision making and hence have low autonomy in their households that leads to their low level of empowerment.

**Table 3:** Distribution of women's autonomy based number of household decision participated by women (N = 23954)

Number of decision participated	Women		Men		Jointly	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
0	74.6	17871	21.9	5239	46.1	11046
1	14.0	3349	12.5	2985	13.4	3211
2	5.3	1273	8.7	2081	8.0	1921
3	3.1	732	8.4	2014	6.4	1526
4	1.6	383	12.4	2962	8.2	1959
5	1.4	337	35.7	8543	15.9	3809
6	0.0	9	0.5	130	2.0	482

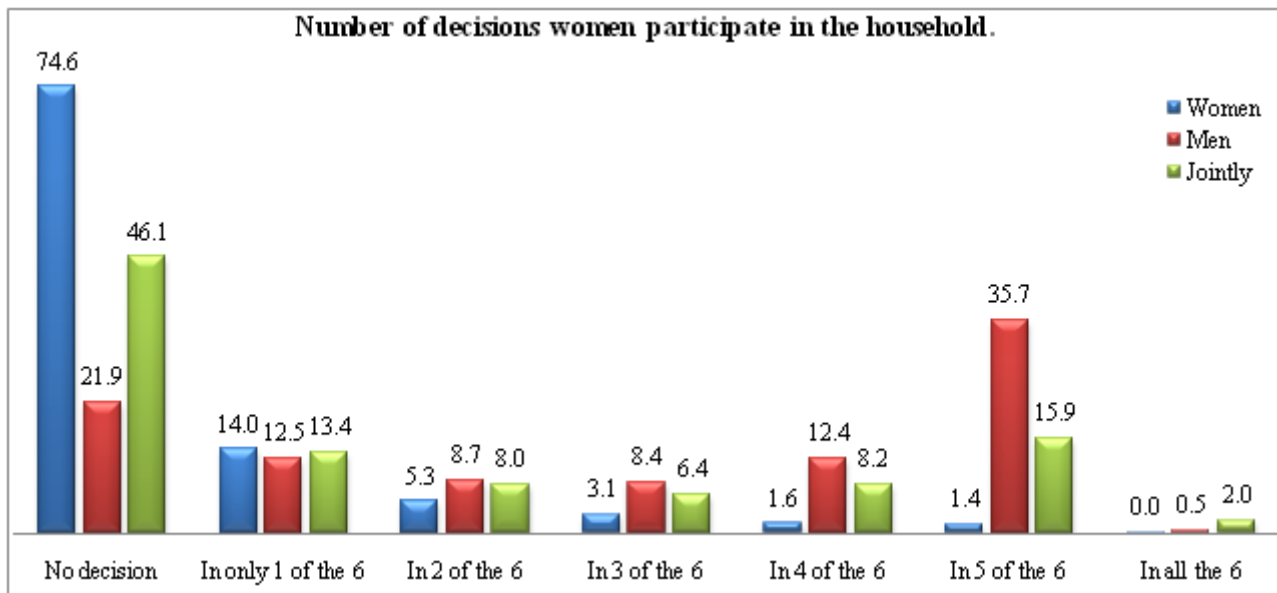


Figure 3

Table 4 presents the results of the percentage participation of women, men and jointly in making each of the decisions in the household. From the results, it observed that higher proportion of women (65.4%) has final say with regards to money earned by their partners and lower percentage (5.4%) and (8.7%) is recorded in making decisions on large household purchases and their health care respectively. For decisions taken by only men, most of the decisions in the

household were made by men alone (as shown by high percentages) except for decisions on contraceptive use (17.8%) and on their earnings (14.5%). Finally, for decisions most of the decisions on the use of contraceptive were made jointly by the couples (64.1%). This can be clearly seen from the Table 4 and figure 4.

Table 4: Percentage participation of women, men and jointly (women/men) in household decision making in Nigeria.

Characteristics	Women		Men		Jointly	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Final say on						
Contraceptive use	495	18.1	485	17.8	1748	64.1
Own Health care	2068	8.7	13690	57.5	8032	33.8
Making large HH purchases	1289	5.4	14870	62.5	7619	32.0
Making small HH purchases	3587	15.1	12340	51.9	7852	33.0
Visit to family/relatives	2464	10.4	10916	45.9	10423	43.8
Husband's earnings	8514	65.4	1883	14.5	2620	20.1

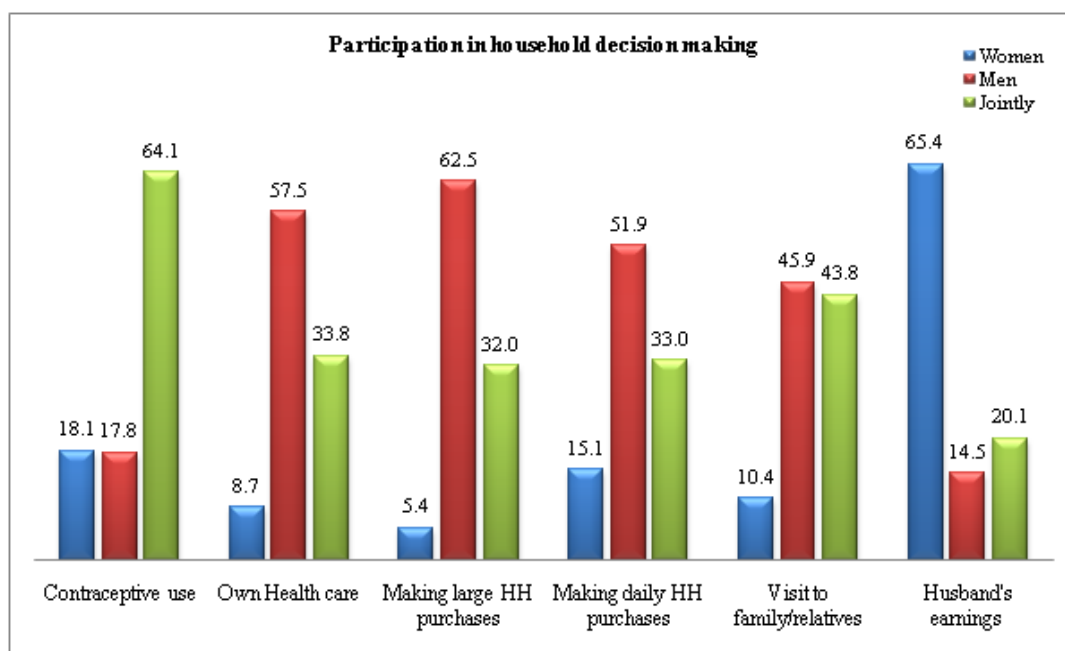


Figure 4

Table 5 is a logistic regression result giving the odds ratios and confidence interval of women’s autonomy in household decisions made by women, men or jointly. From the result, women’s age is having a significant contribution to her autonomy. It can be observed that in decisions made only by women, women of higher age group (35 – 49) years are 45% more likely to be autonomous than women in the lower age group (15 – 34) years. In decisions made only by men, older women are 79% less likely autonomous than younger women as given by values of OR (CI) 0.785\*\* (0.702-0.877), similarly women of older age are 35% more likely to be autonomous if household decisions were made jointly by the couples 1.246\*\* (1.114-1.394). The result shows that age at marriage and age at first birth has no significant contribution to women’s autonomy and hence their empowerment as can be observed from the low odds and confidence interval presented in Table 5. Women with age gap with their partners greater or equal to 5 are 89% less likely to be autonomous in household decisions made by women alone as well as 80% less likely but significant for those made jointly, but about 25% more significantly likely

for the autonomy of women if decisions were made by their partners 1.246\*\* (1.137-1.365). Table 5 also reported that for household decisions made by women alone, their autonomy level is likely to be 17% higher for women with 3 to 5 children than those with more (15%) or less number of children. In the case of decision making by partner alone, women’s autonomy is slightly high for women having more than five children than those with less number of children. It can be observed that respondent education has a significant relationship with the autonomy of women. Women with secondary or higher education level were two times more likely to be autonomous [2.096\*\* (1.723-2.549)] than those in the lower level or no education. Similar case can be observed in decisions made either by women, men or jointly. Couples education gap has no significant effect on women’s autonomy in all decisions made by either woman alone, men alone or jointly. Autonomy increases as women’s standard of living increases; similarly, working women were 97% more likely to have autonomy in household decision than those that are not working.

**Table 5:** Odds Ratios and Confidence Interval from Logistic Regression of Women's Autonomy on Household Decisions made by women, men, and jointly by the couple

<i>Socio demographic Characteristics</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Jointly</i>
<b>Respondent Age</b>	Odds ratio (95%CI)	Odds ratio (95%CI)	Odds ratio (95%CI)
15 - 34 years (REF)			
35 - 49 years	1.445** (1.302 - 1.603)	0.785** (0.702 - 0.877)	1.246** (1.114 - 1.394)
<b>Age at first marriage</b>			
15 - 34 years (REF)			
35 - 49 years	0.681 (0.355 - 1.308)	1.072 (0.557 - 2.0632)	0.903 (0.456 - 1.785)
<b>Age at first birth</b>			
15 - 34 years (REF)			
35 - 49 years	0.899 (0.513 - 1.574)	0.835 (0.477 - 1.459)	0.928 (0.505 - 1.705)
<b>Couples age gap</b>			
< 5 years (REF)			
> 5 years and above	0.933 (0.855 - 1.018)	1.246** (1.137 - 1.365)	0.803** (0.732 - 0.881)
<b>Parity</b>			
0 - 2 children (REF)			
3 - 5 children	1.165** (1.052 - 1.288)	1.064 (0.956 - 1.183)	1.097* (0.989 - 1.216)
Above 5 children	1.145** (0.993 - 1.321)	1.133 (0.974 - 1.317)	1.069 (0.922 - 1.239)
<b>Respondents education</b>			
No education (REF)			
Primary	1.841** (1.517 - 2.234)	0.678** (0.553 - 0.830)	1.784** (1.501 - 2.121)
Secondary/Higher	2.096** (1.723 - 2.549)	0.936 (0.749 - 1.169)	2.555** (2.141 - 3.049)
<b>Couples education gap</b>			
< 5 years (REF)			
5 years above	1.0541 (0.851 - 1.305)	0.934 (0.749 - 1.169)	1.073 (0.890 - 1.294)
<b>Residence</b>			
Urban (REF)			
Rural	1.0544 (0.956 - 1.1631)	0.832** (0.749 - 0.923)	1.133* (1.022 - 1.257)
<b>Wealth status</b>			
Poor (REF)			
Middle	1.189** (1.045 - 1.354)	0.894 (0.782 - 1.022)	1.164* (1.025 - 1.321)
Rich	1.341** (1.183 - 1.519)	0.941 (0.826 - 1.073)	1.258** (1.109 - 1.426)
<b>Work status</b>			
Not working (REF)			

Working	1.966**(1.765 - 2.190)	0.873*(0.784 - 0.972)	1.685**(1.527 - 1.859)
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\*p< 0.05; \*\*p<0.01; REF = Reference group; CI = confidence interval

## 5. Conclusion

Women's rights and autonomy especially at the household level has become a subject of serious concern for both researchers and policy makers. Though the concept of women's autonomy is not easy to capture in just a word, sentence or even by definition because of its varying usage. Women's autonomy may be termed as the combinations of both financial, political, social, cultural, physiological and sexual decision making power exercised by the women folk. As a matter of fact, women's autonomy is referred to as a process of gaining control over their life, body and well-being at a given point in time. It is the ability of the women to gain greater autonomy at a point in time. The study found that women's autonomy in decision making at the household level has direct and significant relationship with their socio economic and demographic characteristics such as age, education, wealth status, type of residence, number of children and work status. We can conclude on the basis of this study that higher proportion of women does not nor have less participation in most of their household decision making either alone or jointly with their spouse and this leads to their low level of empowerment. This finding from the study leads us not to reject our stated hypothesis.

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