

Women's Agency Freedoms and Education Levels in the Post-marital Household: Evidence from Rural India

Nisha Vernekar¹ and Karan Singhal¹

¹*Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India*

Abstract: The importance of women's agency towards the nation and its children's wellbeing has been well established in literature. While studies have looked at the relationship between freedoms of women and education levels of her and her family members, the literature is limited and lacks substantial rigorous evidence. Using a nationally representative dataset we investigate agency freedoms outside the household- whether allowed to work, membership in a social group, and mobility- of women in rural India. Apart from the socioeconomic characteristics at the individual and household level, we also incorporate for social customs, bargaining power, and women's agency prior to her marriage. Using standard regression techniques we find that women who have more educated parents enjoy greater agency freedom across our three outcome variables. The education levels of her in-laws and her husband have little association with her freedoms, however women living with their in-laws are found to be less likely to enjoy agency freedoms. These results might have implications for when and in what aspects of a woman's life, policies that encourage gender equality should be targeted. Incorporating such nuances might help in better design and implementation of existing policies aiming to empower women in rural India.

Keywords: Women, Agency freedom, Education, probit model

Introduction

The importance of women's independence and freedoms that might contribute to the wellbeing of her children, her community, and herself, has been well documented in literature. (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000; Haddad et al., 1997; Engle et al., 1999; Kishor 2000).

Literature on the measurement of wellbeing has shifted from measures of quality of life such as resourcism and utilitarianism that focus largely on resource distribution or utility derived, towards more subjective measurement (Sen, 1979). One of the key criticisms in the shift away from earlier measurements of quality of life was the explanation of 'adaptive preferences'. (Sen, 1984; Khader, S. J., 2011). Marginalized groups might not value certain interests that are seen as fundamental or crucial to wellbeing as they have been socialized into no longer seeing any value in them (Nussbaum M. C., 2001; Sen, 1990)

"The most blatant forms of inequalities and exploitations survive in the world through making allies out of the deprived and the exploited. As people learn to survive to adjust to the existing horrors by sheer necessity of uneventful survival, the horrors look less terrible in the metric of utilities" (Sen 1984)

This is an important concept to account for as recent literature on wellbeing, presented in the capabilities approach, suggests we must concern ourselves with whether an individual is able to and has the freedom to pursue the interests they value. People should have the freedom to be or do the things that they see value in being or doing. These *beings* and *doings* constitute the functionings a person might pursue. Capabilities then constitute both functionings, and opportunity freedoms- the freedom to choose between various functionings in order to achieve a capability. (Crocker, D. A., & Robeyns, I., 2009).



“... the wellbeing of a person may plausibly be seen in terms of a person's functionings and capabilities: what he or she is able to do or be (e.g. the ability to be well nourished, to avoid escapable morbidity and mortality, to read and write and communicate, to take part in the life of the community, to appear in public without shame ..”. (Sen, 1990, p. 126)

With reference to freedoms of women outside the household many have studied agency freedom, a concept that we wish to use for our study. A component of Sen's capability approach, agency freedom refers to “...a person's role as a member of society, with the ability to participate in economic, social, and political actions”, whether or not it contributes to one's personal wellbeing (A. Sen, 1985).

A closely related component of agency is empowerment- overcoming feelings of voicelessness or disempowerment by increasing control over their own lives, such as through institutional participation or participation in such activities that might be directed towards the benefit of society (Subaiya and Vanneman, 2016; Nussbaum, 1990; Alkire, 2005).

Similar to the positive impact that a woman's independence might have on the wellbeing of her family, we find that the specific freedoms that fall under the purview of the concepts of agency and empowerment of women also have similar effects on development outcomes.

Studies suggest that households where women are empowered tend to have fewer children and lower child mortality rates (Rosenzweig, M. and Schultz, 1982; Kanbur and Haddad, 1994), and better education for their children (Thomas, 1990; Llyod and Blanc, 1996; Aslam, 2007), particularly for the girl child (Smith and Bryon, 2005). An increase in women's incomes, associated with them having financial independence, is shown to be associated with increased expenditure on health of their children (Phillips and Burton, 1998; Lundberg et al. 1997). Haddad (1995) shows an association between women's income and expenditure on food for the household. Similarly empowerment of the woman was found to positively affect her family's social status (Quisumbing and de la Bri`ere, 2000). A study from India showed that women elected to local government emphasized issues affecting women in their community such as fuel and water (Kabeer, 2005).

Relevant to an individual's wellbeing and often a part of policy discussion as a route to accessing gainful employment or participation in society, is education and schooling. Education is considered to be an indicator of development in itself (Stiglitz et al., 2009). Households with more educated women tend to show positive development outcomes such as better education and health of their children (Behrman et. al. 1999; Lam and Duryea 1999; Peter and Sahn 1999; Schultz 2002; Chudgar 2009, 2011). Education is thus identified as having an intrinsic value and is considered to be a capability that should be valued.

Education also has an instrumental value whereby it might enhance other capabilities of a person, such as their ability to become gainfully employed, or participate in political activities (Sen, 1999; Dreze and Sen, 1989; Nussbaum, 2003). The capabilities approach discusses, albeit not in detail, the role of education as a “capability enhancer” that may increase other freedoms of a person.

“Social arrangements may be decisively important in securing and expanding freedom of the individual... They (freedoms) are also influenced... by substantive public support in the provision of those facilities (such as basic health care or essential education) that are crucial for the formation and use of human capabilities” (Sen, 1999)

Finally education is said to enhance one's ability to reason, where practical reason is identified as important for recognizing what one chooses to value and thus pursues, thereby enhancing those capabilities (Unterhalter, 2001; Sen, 1992; Nussbaum, 2000). Jejeebhoy (1995) presents evidence that access to education provides women the ability to reflect on and question their circumstances by introducing them to new ideas.

Many studies have associated better education, especially of mothers, with her agency freedom and bargaining power. The better educated tend to have lower unemployment, more social connection, and higher engagement

in civic and political life (Stiglitz et al., 2009). Better-educated women have greater bargaining power and influence over household decisions and resources (Rahman and Rao, 2004; Acharya et al. 2010; Mahmud, Shah and Becker, 2012).

At the same time there are certain studies that refute the claim that education might lead to greater agency for women. In South Asia Jeffrey and Jeffrey (1998) explicitly claim there is no causal link between education and women's autonomy. Kuenning and Amin (2001) in reference to Bangladesh argue that education as is cannot change or challenge circumstances of limited freedom. Kabeer (2005) furthers this claim on grounds that content taught in schools is often gendered, which might perpetuate inequalities.

In trying to better understand the link between education and agency our study looks at specific agency freedoms at different education levels of married women in India. We work under the assumption that the variables we have selected in our study factor into the interests of women, and might be valued in the absence of deprivation or from the eyes of a neutral observer. (Sen, 1985; Nussbaum, 2011) We do not seek to measure empowerment as we use cross-sectional data, and cannot capture its dynamic conceptualization.

We consider whether women are allowed to be mobile, work, and participate in social groups outside the household, to represent agency freedoms (Sen, 1985). We further consider education levels of the woman and of different family members- her husband, her in-laws, and her parents- as assets of different family members are shown to limit and enhance the agency of women in different ways (Agarwal, 1997; Jensen and Thornton, 2003; Beegle, Frankenberg, and Thomas, 2001). We stress on the role of her post-marital household as Indian women spend majority of their adult life in their post-marital households, making it important to understand how this environment contributes to increasing or decreasing her freedoms.

Our first major distinction from studies on the association between education and freedoms is that we attempt to control for variables that represent freedom and/ or bargaining power that a woman might have within the household. Studies suggest that having freedom in activities outside the household might be associated with having greater freedom within the household as well. As a result many studies consider activities representing empowerment- such as political participation, employment outside the home, ownership of assets- as proxies for bargaining power within the household (Anderson and Eswaran, 2009; Hashemi et al., 1996; Rahman and Rao, 2004).

Secondly, we attempt to control for agency of the woman prior to marriage by virtue of which we are able to control for adaptive preferences. Studies suggest that women's freedoms change prior to, and post marriage on the basis of many factors. For example Cain (1988) shows increasing agency in certain cultures when a married woman has children (especially if the child is a boy), and once she becomes an in-law (Dyson and Moore, 1983). This further complements existing literature suggesting that one requires some level of agency to acquire education, which might in turn lead to greater freedom in the future (Sen 1999; Unterhalter, 2003)

Thirdly, we control for social customs that is seen to impact agency of women- *burkah/ purdah* system- specifically with respect to freedom outside the household (Dyson and Moore, 1983).

We assess whether education of different family members has a role to play in agency freedom of a married woman and find that women who have more educated parents, and who are more educated themselves enjoy greater agency freedom across our three outcome variables after controlling for socio-economic characteristics. The education levels of her in-laws and her husband have little association with her freedoms, however women living with their in-laws are found to be less likely to enjoy agency freedoms.

The structure of our paper is as follows. Section 2 details the data and variables used in our study. Section 3 discusses the method and analysis used. Section 4 presents the descriptive statistics tables and results from the regression analysis, and we conclude in Section 5.

Data and Variables

Our study uses data derived from the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) jointly conducted by National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi, India and the University of Maryland, published in 2011-12. The nationally representative survey was conducted across 33 states of rural and urban India, and administered on over two lakh individuals.

We primarily consider only one component of the survey- the Women's Questionnaire- which interviewed approximately 39,800 women between the ages of 15-49 years (as of 2005), capturing women's perspectives about their decision-making power, agency freedom, and social customs such as acceptability of domestic violence, within their household and community, amongst other questions.

Outcome Variables

The three categories of agency freedoms considered in our study are economic participation, social group participation, and mobility within a village/ neighbourhood.

Economic participation is measured using the binary variable, which captures if a woman is allowed to or not allowed to take up a job if they were to find a suitable one.

Social group participation considers whether a woman is allowed to participate in any one of four social group organisations that were mentioned in the questionnaire- *Mahila Samakhya*, Credit/ Savings Group, Self-Help Group, or a Political Group. We consider that a woman is a member of social groups if she has responded that she participates in any one of the four groups, which represents whether a woman has the opportunity or freedom to choose to participate in these groups, representing her agency freedom.

Variables representing mobility in IHDS ask whether the women must take permission to be mobile within their village. The two activities are visiting the *kirana* shop, and visiting the homes of a friend/ relative within the village.

Explanatory Variables

Education Levels

Primary variables of interest are the education levels of the household members. We consider education levels, categorized as number of years of schooling- 1) Below 5th (Primary Education), 2) 6th-10th (Upper primary and Secondary Education), and 3) 11th and above (including Bachelors, Post Graduate studies). This categorization was done on the basis of variation provided across groups and to maintain observations in each category allowing for comparison. Preliminary analysis prior to this categorization does not show any change in the analysis.

Studies have discussed how women who are more educated than their husbands tend to have greater bargaining power in the household (Beegle, Frankenberg, and Thomas, 2001). Thus, we further consider the difference between education levels of the woman and her husband represented as a categorical variable for when the education levels are equal, when the woman is more educated than her husband, and when her husband is more educated than her.

Household Characteristics

Post- marital household type and marital status are considered to account for whether the presence of a woman's parents or her in-laws living within the same household impacts her agency.

We further control for monthly per capita expenditure of the household (normalized using natural log), and the house type (*pucca/ kutcha*), caste and religion, and geographical distribution of households across the states. Caste and religion are important controls as Schedules Castes and Tribes tend to have more agency freedoms to pursue economic pursuits because their economic status is usually comparatively lower than other caste groups, while Muslim women tend to enjoy least freedom in most domains. As a result education levels also systematically differ across these groups.

Women's Characteristics

We include variables representing agency of the women 1) prior to marriage- captured in her education level, and 2) post- marriage as represented in her capabilities within the household. We look at whether the woman has money in hand to spend on household expenses. This is in keeping with studies that suggest that a woman's bargaining power and agency are interconnected.

We control for the age of the woman (treated as a continuous variable), and whether she must wear burkha, *ghunghat*, or *purdah* as per the customs of her household.

We take the difference of age between the woman and her husband, which is treated as a continuous variable moving from women being older than their husbands, to their husband being older.

Methods and Analysis

Given the binary nature of our dependent variables- whether allowed to work, member of social group or allowed to visit relative, friend, or *kirana* shop within a village - a probit regression model would be suitable to estimate the probability that an observation with particular characteristics will fall into a specific category of the dependent variable.

To measure the association of the dependent variables with the explanatory variables, we assume the following function:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Educational characteristics}) + \beta_2(\text{Controls}) + \beta_3(\text{State dummies}) + \varepsilon$$

Y indicates the dependent variables allowed to work, allowed to visit a relative, friend, or kirana shop, and whether a member of any social group for every woman i in the sample. β_1 is the vector of all education related variables such as education level of the women, her husband, her parents and in-laws and the difference in education between her and her husband. β_2 is the vector of all other control variables which include socioeconomic characteristics, place of residence, few capabilities within the household among others, β_3 is a vector of all state dummies and ε is the error term for every woman/household i . Standard errors are clustered at the neighbourhood/village level in all the specifications.

Given the complexity in the relationship of our variables of interest, such a simple specification would be unable to determine causality. Though this is a limitation in the functional form we have opted for, our aim is to find associations of educational characteristics with various agency freedoms and hence causality is outside the scope of our analytical framework.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Tables 2, and 3 present descriptive statistics for the overall sample in our model, as well as categorized by the level of agency freedoms enjoyed by the women in the three different outcome variables.

Comparing with the overall sample we see that women who are allowed to work seem to come from relatively better-educated households, with higher monthly per capita incomes, and live in pucca houses. More women who are allowed to work, compared to those who are not allowed to, are better-educated themselves, older, and share a lower age difference with their husbands. Studies have suggested that there is an association of these factors with greater independence of women. On the other hand, contrary to what is suggested in literature, we find that more women who are married, live with their in-laws and adhere to the practice of purdah/ gunghat are also allowed to work.

Similarly, more women who do not require permission to be mobile within their village or neighbourhood are also older, married, live with their in-laws, and live in a *pucca* houses. However, education level of household members does not differ from the overall sample. The education of only the woman and her husband are marginally higher in such households.

More women who are allowed to participate in social groups, compared to those not allowed to, have between six to ten years of schooling, and tend to be more educated than their husband. More mothers of those women who are allowed to be members in social groups also have between six to ten years of education, whereas there is no difference seen in education levels of mother in laws. Father's and father in law's of the woman who are allowed to be members of social groups are less educated. Once again more women who participate in social groups are older, and belong to households with a higher per capita income.

Table 1 Proportions of women in the sample enjoying agency freedoms

Agency Freedoms	
Allowed to work	
Yes	65.89
No	34.11
Be member of social group	
Yes	21.15
No	78.85
Be mobile within village	
Yes	74.70
No	25.30

Table 2 Education Levels of the Woman and her family members across Outcome Variables

	Complete Sample	Allowed to Work	Allowed to be member of social group	Allowed to be mobile within the village
Education Levels				
Woman's Education Levels				
Below 5th	64.10	60.21	59.91	62.75
6th-10th	27.95	30.07	32.25	28.91
Above 10th	7.95	9.72	7.84	8.34
Husband's Education Levels				
Below 5th	44.48	39.72	46.60	43.54
6th-10th	39.63	42.03	39.16	40.20

Above 10th	15.89	18.25	14.24	16.26
Mother's Education Levels				
Below 5th	93.39	92.19	92.74	93.49
6th-10th	6.08	7.10	6.94	5.98
Above 10th	0.52	0.71	0.33	0.53
Father's Education Levels				
Below 5th	78.10	73.05	81.11	77.76
6th-10th	17.82	21.21	15.93	18.12
Above 10th	4.08	5.74	2.96	4.12
Mother in law's Education Levels				
Below 5th	96.09	95.48	95.69	96.02
6th-10th	3.61	4.11	4.06	3.72
Above 10th	0.30	0.41	0.26	0.26
Father in law's Education Levels				
Below 5th	82.80	79.41	85.87	82.09
6th-10th	14.23	16.53	12.47	14.75
Above 10th	2.97	4.07	1.66	3.17
Education difference between woman and her husband				
Equal education	30.60	29.00	30.60	30.99
Woman's education greater	16.67	17.60	20.81	17.33
Husband's education greater	52.73	53.40	48.59	51.67

Table 3 Characteristics of the Woman and her household across Outcome Variables

	Complete Sample	Allowed to Work	Allowed to be member of social group	Allowed to be mobile within the village
Woman's Characteristics				
Age (mean)	29.31	33.59	37.77	35.11
Age difference between woman and husband (mean)	5.02	4.56	5.97	4.96
Marital Status				
Married	93.69	96.29	92.81	96.54
Divorced/ Separated/ Widowed	6.31	3.71	7.19	3.46
Has cash in hand				
Yes	89.80	89.32	92.88	89.15
No	10.20	10.68	7.12	10.85

Follows purdah/ burkah/ gunghat				
Yes	62.68	73.16	40.53	62.48
No	37.32	26.84	59.47	37.52
Household Characteristics				
Caste/ Religion				
Brahmin 1	4.09	5.17	2.23	4.04
Forward caste 2	14.32	14.75	15.74	15.73
OBC 3	34.94	34.14	38.02	35.35
Dalit 4	22.48	23.35	25.49	22.77
Adivasi 5	11.04	9.12	10.69	9.85
Muslim 6	10.89	11.08	6.05	9.75
Christian, Sikh, Jain 7	2.24	2.40	1.78	2.50
Post-marital Household Type				
Parents live in household				
Yes	5.04	4.91	6.06	5.11
In law lives in household				
Yes	39.78	45.71	32.87	43.42
Per capita monthly expenditure (mean)				
	20634.31	20711.13	23938.94	22051.58
Household type				
Katcha	37.03	36.20	38.36	35.40
Pucca	62.97	63.80	61.64	64.60

We additionally compute mean education levels across the three outcome variables. On comparison we see that women who are allowed to work have husbands who are marginally less educated than of those women who are not allowed to work.

Women who are allowed to be members of social groups tend to belong to less educated households although her father's education might be marginally higher than father's of those not allowed to be a part of social groups. Women who are allowed to be mobile within their village/ neighbourhood are more educated, *and have more educated husbands, fathers, and father in laws.*

Education levels are highest for all family members belonging to the Brahmin and Forward Caste groups, as well as for people who belong to the Christian, Sikh, or Jain religions. People belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes have the lowest education levels across family members, followed by Muslim women. Further as expected, less educated people tend to live in Katcha houses. This table can be presented upon request.

Regression Results

Being allowed to work

In the overall sample with rural and urban households we see that a woman's mother's education level is positively associated with her being allowed to work (significant at the 1%) for the category of 6-10 years of schooling, as compared to having 5 years of schooling or less, implying that women with more educated mothers are more likely to be allowed to work. The woman's mother-in law's education shows a weaker positive association (significant at 10%) when educated above 10th grade, and her father-in law's education shows a negative association in the category of 6-10th grade (at 10%).

In rural households a similar trend is seen. Her mother's education level becomes significant at both categories of education, as does her father's education if he has completed more than 10 years of schooling.

Interestingly, a woman's husband's education seems to have no association with her being allowed to work, however in the overall sample there is a strong negative association of a woman being allowed to work if her husband is more educated than her (as opposed to them having equal education levels). Women who are allowed to work are more likely to be better educated (significant at 1%) for women educated above 10th grade.

Further, women are more likely to work if they are younger, and share a lower age difference with their husbands, have lower monthly per capita incomes and live in *pacca* houses. In the overall sample women are less likely to be allowed to work if they live in urban households (at 1%). Further, Scheduled Caste women are most likely, and Muslim women are least likely to be allowed to work in both specifications.

In keeping with literature, we find that women living with their in-laws are less likely to be allowed to work, and those who have cash in hand to spend are more likely to be allowed to work. Both these correlations are significant in both specifications (at 1%).

Becoming a member of social groups

Interestingly no family member's education level shows any significant association with this agency freedom, except a negative association if her father in law is educated above 10th grade (with below 5th grade as reference). However, our results show a positive association of her likelihood to participate if she has completed between 6-10 years of schooling, if she is more educated than her husband (at 1%), and if her husband is more educated than her (at a lower level of significance).

A woman is also more likely to participate if she lives with her parents, and less likely to be allowed if she lives with her in-laws. Further, older women, with larger differences in age with her husband, and belonging to rural households are more likely to participate. Rural households with higher per capita incomes show a positive association (at 1%). Except for Muslim women all other women are more likely to participate in social groups, and women who adhere to the practice of wearing *gunghat/ purdah/ burkhah* are less likely to participate.

Mobility

In keeping with the results in the other specifications, a woman's likelihood to be allowed to be mobile is higher if her father and/or mother have higher education levels, if her father in-law has lower education levels, and if her husband is more educated than her. In the rural household specification the significance of association with her mother's education disappears however the others persist. A woman's education level is not significantly associated with her freedom to be mobile within her village/ neighbourhood.

Older women, those living with their in-laws and those living in Pucca houses, are more likely to be allowed to be mobile.

In Table 2 we compute mean education levels across the three outcome variables. On comparison we see that women who are allowed to work have husbands who are marginally less educated than of those women who are not allowed to work.

Women who are allowed to be members of social groups tend to belong to less educated households although her father's education might be marginally higher than father's of those not allowed to be a part of social groups. Women who are allowed to be mobile within their village/ neighbourhood are more educated, *and have more educated husbands, fathers, and father in laws.*

Education levels are highest for all family members belonging to the Brahmin and Forward Caste groups, as well as for people who belong to the Christian, Sikh, or Jain religions. People belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes have the lowest education levels across family members, followed by Muslim women. Further as expected, less educated people tend to live in Katcha houses.

Table 4 Regression Results

	Allowed to Work	Allowed to be member of a Social Group	Not Allowed to be Mobile (Only Rural India)
Woman's Education			
Reference Below 5th			
6-10th	0.0793** (0.0385)	0.178*** (0.0348)	0.0234 (0.0333)
Above 10th	0.391*** (0.0660)	0.0961 (0.0609)	0.0123 (0.0578)
Mother's Education			
Reference Below 5th			
6-10th	0.153*** (0.0546)	-0.0219 (0.0490)	-0.0539 (0.0460)
Above 10th	0.272* (0.167)	-0.176 (0.186)	0.0225 (0.155)
Mother-in-law's Education			
Reference Below 5th			
6-10th	0.0589 (0.0656)	-0.00996 (0.0664)	0.0340 (0.0627)
Above 10th	0.437* (0.232)	-0.164 (0.225)	-0.295 (0.193)
Father's Education Level			
Reference Below 5th			
6-10th	0.0293 (0.0340)	0.0441 (0.0332)	-0.0437 (0.0296)
Above 10th	0.131* (0.0676)	0.119 (0.0729)	-0.125** (0.0573)
Father-in-law's Education			
Reference Below 5th			
6-10th	-0.0942** (0.0389)	0.00198 (0.0371)	0.0530 (0.0354)
Above 10th	-0.106 (0.0733)	-0.165* (0.0877)	0.146* (0.0770)

	Allowed to Work	Allowed to be member of a Social Group	Not Allowed to be Mobile (Only Rural India)
Husband's Education			
Reference Below 5th			
6-10th	-0.0357 (0.0363)	0.0417 (0.0324)	-0.0299 (0.0307)
Above 10th	-0.0438 (0.0535)	-0.00312 (0.0497)	-0.0181 (0.0446)
Controls	YES	YES	YES
State Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES
Constant	4.488*** (0.721)	-5.006*** (0.662)	2.398*** (0.673)
Pseudo R Square	0.1852	0.2194	0.1074
N	15287	22741	22641

Conclusion

Using a nationally representative dataset conducted in 2011, we find that education levels of either or both of a woman's parents are positively and significantly associated with her agency freedom, controlling for her education level. The difference in education levels between her and her husband also seem to be associated with the agency freedoms considered, however in different ways.

While the education of her in-laws and her husband has little association on her freedom, women who live with their in-laws, and who are relatively younger than their husbands seem to enjoy less freedom.

All other controls used in our study, such as socio-economic characteristics of the household, capabilities of the woman that might enhance her freedom, her agency freedom prior marriage, and social customs shown to be negatively associated with greater freedom, were found to be associated with the agency freedoms we have considered, in predictable ways, as suggested by literature.

This finding- that education levels of the members of a woman's post-marital family might not be associated with her freedom to work, be mobile, or become a member of social and political groups, regardless of whether they live with her- might imply that a woman's agency freedom is possibly determined prior to her marriage into a family, or rather in her natal home. As literature suggests, the attainment of educational endowments for a woman requires her to have enjoyed some level of capability (Sen 1999; Unterhalter, 2003), which might further imply that a woman's agency prior to marriage is what determines her agency freedom even in her post-marital household.

Our results may have potential policy implications. They help us better understand the segregation- on account of education levels and types of marital residence- that exists among those that lack basic rights. Incorporating such a distinction within the policy framework might help in better implementation of the existing policies. Based on our findings, policies that aim to incentivize the participation of women in activities outside the households should perhaps be targeted towards women and her parents in her natal home itself, prior to

marriage. Further investigation is required to understand whether teaching young girls and boys about agency freedoms and participation of women outside the household would have a bearing on their freedoms post marriage. While we have been making small strides towards ensuring basic rights for women, we need to move away from the one-size-fits-all approach and adopt a more nuanced policy-making process for better success.

Acknowledgements

We thank Praveena Kodoth and reviewers at the World Conference on Women's Studies, Colombo for their inputs.

References

- Acharya Dev, R., Jacqueline S. Bell, Padam Simkhada, Edwin R. van Teijlingen, and Pramod R. Regmi. 2010. "Women's Autonomy in Household Decision-making: A Demographic Study in Nepal." *Reproductive Health*, 7(15): 1-12.
- Adato, M., De la Briere, B., Mindek, D., & Quisumbing, A. (2000). The impact of PROGRESA on women's status and intrahousehold relations. *Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute*.
- Agarwal, B. (1997). "Bargaining" and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household. *Feminist economics*, 3(1), 1-51.
- Alderman, H., Haddad, L., & Hoddinott, J. (1997). 17 Policy Issues and Intrahousehold Resource Allocation: Conclusions. *Intrahousehold Resource Allocation in Developing Countries*, 275.
- Alkire, S. (2005). Subjective quantitative studies of human agency. *Social Indicators Research*, 74(1), 217-260.
- Allendorf, K. (2012). Women's agency and the quality of family relationships in India. *Population research and policy review*, 31(2), 187-206.
- Arends-Kuenning, M., & Amin, S. (2001). Women's capabilities and the right to education in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 15(1), 125-142.
- Aslam, M. (2007). Rates of return to education by gender in Pakistan.
- Becker S. (1996), "Couples and reproductive health: a review of couples studies", *Studies in Family Planning*, 27(6), 291-306.
- Behrman, J. R., Foster, A., Rosenzweig, M. R., & Vahsishtha, P. (1999). Women's schooling, home teaching, and economic growth. *Journal of Political Economy*, 107(4), 682-715.
- Beegle, K., Frankenberg, E., & Thomas, D. (2001). Bargaining power within couples and use of prenatal and delivery care in Indonesia. *Studies in family planning*, 32(2), 130-146.
- Branch, K. (1994). Are Women Worth as Much as Men: Employment Inequities, Gender Roles, and Public Policy. *Duke J. Gender L. & Pol'y*, 1, 119.
- Brian Maddox (2008) What Good is Literacy? Insights and Implications of the Capabilities Approach, *Journal of Human Development*
- Cain, M. (1988). The material consequences of reproductive failure in rural South Asia. *A home divided: Women and income in the Third World*, 20-38.
- Chudgar, A. (2009). Does adult literacy have a role to play in addressing the universal elementary education challenge in India? *Comparative Education Review*, 53(3), 403-433.
- Chudgar, A. (2011). Female headship and schooling outcomes in rural India. *World Development*, 39(4), 550-560.
- Crocker, D. A., & Robeyns, I. (2009). Capability and agency. *Amartya Sen*, 60-90.
- Desai, Sonalde, Reeve Vanneman and National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi. India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II), 2011-12. ICPSR36151-v2. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2015-07-31. <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36151.v2>
- Dre`ze, Jean and Sen, Amartya (1995) *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

- Dreze, Jean and Sen, Amartya (1998) *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspective* (Delhi, Oxford University Press).
- Dreze, J., & Sen, A. K. (2002). *India: Development and participation*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Dyson, T., and M. Moore. 1983. "On Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy, and Demographic Behavior in India." *Population and Development Review*, 9(1): 35–60.
- Eckhardt, S. (1999). „Household Decision Making and Contraceptive Use in Indonesia“, Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques, mimeo.
- Elster, J. (1983). *Sour grapes: studies in the subversion of rationality*. Cambridge
- Flores-Crespo, P. (2007). Situating education in the human capabilities approach. In *Amartya*
- Handa, S. 1996. "Expenditure behavior and children's welfare: An analysis of female headed households in Jamaica." *Journal of Development Economics*, 50(1): 165 – 187.
- Hoddinott, J., & Haddad, L. (1995). Does female income share influence household expenditures? Evidence from Cote D'Ivoire. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 57(1), 77–96.
- Jejeebhoy, S. (1995) *Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Developing Countries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Jensen, R., & Thornton, R. (2003). Early female marriage in the developing world. *Gender & Development*, 11(2), 9-19.
- Kanbur, R., and L. Haddad. 1994. "Are better off households more equal or less equal?" *Oxford Economic Papers*, 46(3): 445–58.
- Khader, S. J. (2011). *Adaptive preferences and women's empowerment*. OUP USA.
- Lam, D., & Duryea, S. (1999). Effects of schooling on fertility, labor supply and investments in children, with evidence from Brazil. *Journal of Human Resources*, 34(1), 160–192.
- Lloyd, C. B., & Blanc, A. K. (1996). Children's schooling in sub-Saharan Africa: The role of fathers, mothers, and others. *Population and development review*, 265-298.
- Lundberg, S., & Pollak, R. A. (1993). Separate spheres bargaining and the marriage market. *Journal of political Economy*, 101(6), 988-1010.
- Lundberg, S., & Pollak, R. A. (1996). Bargaining and distribution in marriage. *The journal of economic perspectives*, 10(4), 139-158.
- Mahmud, Simeen, Nirali M. Shah, and Stan Becker. 2012. "Measurement of Women's Empowerment in Rural Bangladesh." *World Development* 40(3): 610-19.
- Malhotra, A., & Schuler, S. R. (2005). Women's empowerment as a variable in international development. *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*, 71-88.
- Martha C. Nussbaum (2006) *Education and Democratic Citizenship: Capabilities and Quality Education*, *Journal of Human Development*
- Martha C. Nussbaum Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics (2005) *Women's Bodies: Violence, Security, Capabilities*, *Journal of Human Development*, 6:2, 167-183
- Kabeer, N. (2005) *Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1*, *Gender & Development*
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). Symposium On Amartya Sen's Philosophy: 5 Adaptive Preferences And Women's Options. *Economics and Philosophy*, 17, 67-88.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. and Sen, Amartya K. (1998) *The Quality of Life* (Oxford, Clarendon Press).
- Orloff, A. S. (1993). Gender And Tie Social Rights Of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis Of Gender Relations And Welfare States. *American Sociological Review*, 58(3), 303-328.
- Panda, P., & Agarwal, B. (2005). Marital Violence, Human Development and Women's Property Status in India. *World Development*, 33(5), 823-850.

- Peter, G., & Sahn, D. E. (1999). Schooling of girls and boys in a West African country: the effects of parental education, income, and household structure. *Economics of Education Review*, 19(1), 63–87.
- Phillips, S. A., & Burton, P. S. (1998). What's mine is yours? The influence of male and female incomes on patterns of household expenditure. *Economica*, 65(260), 593–613.
- Quisumbing, A., & Maluccio, J. (2000). Intrahousehold allocation and gender relations: new empirical evidence from four developing countries. International Food Policy Research Institute (FCND) Discussion Paper 84.
- Rahman, L., & Rao, V. (2004). The determinants of gender equity in India: examining Dyson and Moore's thesis with new data. *Population and Development Review*, 30(2), 239-268.
- Raynor, J. (2007). Education and capabilities in Bangladesh. *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education*, 157-176.
- Rosenzweig, M., and T. P. Schultz. 1982. "Market Opportunities, Genetic Endowments, and Intrafamily Resource Distribution: Child Survival in Rural India." *The American Economic Review*, 72(4): 803–815.
- Saito, M. (2003). Amartya Sen's capability approach to education: A critical exploration. *Journal of philosophy of education*, 37(1), 17-33.
- Sen, A. (1980). *Equality of what?* (Vol. 1, pp. 197-220). Na.
- Sen, A. (1984). *Resources, Values and Development*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Sen, A.
- Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984. *The journal of philosophy*, 82(4), 169-221.
- Sen, A. (1990). Welfare, freedom and social choice: a reply. *Recherches Économiques de Louvain/Louvain Economic Review*, 56(3-4), 451-485.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Commodities and capabilities*. OUP Catalogue.
- Sen, A. K. (1990). Development as capability expansion. *The Community Development Reader*.
- Sen, Amartya. "Human rights and capabilities." *Journal of human development* 6.2 (2005): 151-166.
- Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 45-65). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Singh, A., Gaurav, S., & Das, U. (2013). Household headship and academic skills of Indian children: A special focus on gender disparities. *European Journal of Population/Revue européenne de Démographie*, 29(4), 445-466.
- Smith, L. C., & Byron, E. M. (2005). Is greater decisionmaking power of women associated with reduced gender discrimination in South Asia?. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Stiglitz, J., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J. P. (2009). The measurement of economic performance and social progress revisited. *Reflections and overview. Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, Paris*.
- Subaiya, L., & Vanneman, R. (2016). The Multi-dimensionality of Development and Gender Empowerment: Women's Decision-Making and Mobility in India.
- Teschl, M., & Comim, F. (2005). Adaptive preferences and capabilities: some preliminary conceptual explorations. *Review of social economy*, 63(2), 229-247.
- Thomas, D. 1990. "Intra-Household Resource Allocation: An Inferential Approach." *The Journal of Human Resources*, 25(4): 635–664.
- Unterhalter, E. (2003). The capabilities approach and gendered education: An examination of South African complexities. *School Field*, 1(1), 7-22