

Comparing the Decision-Making Power of Women at Household in Rural and Urban Areas of Islamabad, Pakistan: A Comparison of Nuclear and Joint Families

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Abstract: This research explores the decision-making power of married women in two distinct family structures: urban nuclear families and rural joint family systems in Pakistan, within the context of societal gender inequality and male dominance. The study aims to compare the decision-making abilities and participation of women in these settings, focusing on how different family structures influence their autonomy. Utilizing Liberal Feminism theory, which highlights social and cultural factors inhibiting women's agency across personal, familial, workplace, and community spheres, the study employs a quantitative approach. Data was collected through purposive sampling and structured interviews in two locations: The F-7/2 sector in Islamabad (urban) and Tarlai Kalan, Lehtrar Road in Islamabad (rural). Statistical analysis, using SPSS (version 22.0), included descriptive and inferential methods such as frequency, percentage, and correlation tests for comparative analysis. Key findings reveal that urban women exhibit greater decision-making power than their rural counterparts. However, male dominance remains pervasive in both settings, with male family elders holding the majority of decision-making power, even among educated women. The research also highlights that women's financial dependency, especially in the absence of employment, further limits their autonomy. The study concludes that no single factor enables women to become fully independent decision-makers, and societal barriers-such as male-dominated cultural norms, early marriages, and gender-based violence-continue to hinder women's progress. The research recommends the prevention of early marriages, greater empowerment of women, and universal access to education as essential steps toward achieving gender equality in the family, community, and society.

Keywords: Decision-Making Power, Urban and Rural Areas, SPSS, Power, Family Systems.

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1. Introduction

Pakistan is located in an area which is known as the "Patriarchal belt" Caldwell, 1982, as cited by Tabassum, [1]. According to the 2017 census, its total population is 206 million people, where half of the populations are mainly women. Pakistani societies are patriarchal, and these patriarchal systems become a hindrance for females in the social, political, economic, and other aspects. In Pakistan, women are measured through different aspects, whether they are single or married, such as education, employment, medical facilities, and their involvement in the decision-making process of a family. Their overall status is quite low. The status of women in Pakistan is relatively inferior to that of males. Women perform different roles at different stages of life in the form of mother, sister, daughter, and wife. Women who are married must take good care of their kids, which is their sole duty. Thus, women are not given equal status.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who is the founder of Pakistan, gives his ideology for the status of Pakistani women. According to Jinnah, "no nation can rise to the height of glory unless its women are side by side with them. It is a crime against humanity that over women are shut up within the four walls of the house as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which over women have to live." Whereas, in Pakistan, its opposite things are not the same as they should be, as stated by the founder of Pakistan. Women's position is subordinated just because patriarchal values are entrenched in Pakistani societies, Hadi [2].

Pakistan society is a male-dominated society where males are given the chance to flourish, and the other half of the human beings are not given chances to do what they want to. Pakistan is an Islamic republic, and all laws are based on Islam, but when it comes to women, it is the culture that defines what is right or wrong for them. The culture of many areas does not allow them to exercise their rights given by Islam and protected by the laws of the country. The patriarchal system has aroused disrespect for women in Pakistani society, Bhattacharya, 179-189: [3]. Janghorban [4] states that the decision-making power of women within the family is related to the empowerment of females. Whereas empowerment is the ability through which one has the authority to claim their right. For the development of any country, talent is necessary, and women contribute half of it. Consequently, the development of any nation relies on the opportunities given to females by their society. Once they flourish their talents, then a country can benefit from their skills. Women's empowerment is the process of transformation in some stages of a woman's life by elevating their capacity to have an enriched life. Empowerment of women is considered important for gender equality, and gender equality can only be attained by keeping gender bias aside and providing everyone equal rights, Duties, and opportunities.

Household decision-making also results in domestic violence, and intimate partner violence is one of its forms. Women experience such violence. Effects of intimate partner violence are not temporary; they can be permanent or continue into the upcoming generations. Their offspring suffer either directly or indirectly, and the consequences are critical in both cases. Decisions made by both partners, and if the women solely made them, then the chances of intimate partner violence are lower, whereas if men made the decisions alone, then women suffer from such violence. Furthermore, Women never predict how much they will suffer, but men can predict how much women will experience intimate partner violence, Acharya [5].

The decision-making power of females impacts the utilization of family planning. Married women's decision-making power is based on various factors, like the husband's about how

many kids he wants and when, Household monthly income, and use of contraceptive methods through which they can have a say in family planning use Alemayehu [6]. Women's decision-making and autonomy are directly related to each other. Women's generating activities, education, and economic level must be endorsed. Formal education of women will help the husband and wife to understand each other, and thus this will improve the household and community level Reggasa & Reggasa, [7].

In a household, there are several indicators that indicate who will become the decision maker. Married women's decision-making is associated with their family background, and it is the education that makes them capable of deciding and developing a better understanding between husband and wife. Besides all the factors contributing to the higher level of women, the most important is education, which will not only raise her status but will help her to do further what they desires to Tutu & Ampadu, [8].

Women's veil is considered a restrictive mark, and they are deprived of their rights in different affairs. In rural areas, people have created stricter barriers in the name of Islam, but it is not the Islam that is the barrier, but the cultural values. Many people in Pakistan and other religions think that Islam is a strict religion, but it is not true. Instead of creating hurdles, it motivates women to do work of their choice. Whereas in the Quran, many ayahs and surahs have supported and given proof that both women and men are important and no one is inferior to the other. It emphasizes education that should be given to females and males on an equal basis. Moreover, the Quran has various verse that shows that women should be given their rights, not treated as if she is inferior and should be given respect. According to the verse of the holy Quran: "O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your lord, who created you from a single soul and its mate, and they have spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in whom you claim (your rights) of one another, and towards the wombs (that bore you). Lo! Allah has been watcher over you." (An-Nisa 4:1) Another verse narrated by Anas given by Muhammad (S.A.W.W) about the blessed marriage is that: "Whoever marries a woman for her glory, Allah will not increase his, but will bring him humiliation; whoever marries her for her wealth, Allah will not increase his, but place him in poverty; whoever marries her for ancestral claims, Allah will not increase his; but in meanness; whoever marries a woman for nothing but to cast down his eyes, guard his private parts, and join a relationship, Allah will bless them through her and vice versa".

Women of Pakistan are not given their social, economic, and political rights; they are living within the four walls of their house and under the traditional norms. One bitter reality is that cultural values are preferred over Islamic values, even though it is an Islamic republic.

Pakistan is a developing country where 40% of people are facing poverty issues. According to the United Nations Development Index, out of 189 countries, it ranks at 152nd position. Furthermore, the global Gender Development Index ranks Pakistan at 151st position out of 153 countries, and the World Economic Forum states that Pakistan is a dangerous country for women. Pakistan's society is conservative and male-dominated, which is why women's participation in decision-making is lower. The situation of women in Pakistani societies is not good enough. They are deprived of their rights, whether the rights are related to household matters or the equality they want in society. As in Pakistani societies, masculinity prevails, so the women are forced to live a life they have not dreamed of because of the cultural, religious, and social grading of males. In urban and rural households, they are not independent in making decisions, and if so, what are the factors that make them independent in making decisions? The researcher in this research tried to compare the decision-making power of urban women in nuclear family type with that of rural women living in joint families and their abilities to decide.

According to liberal feminism, women's private life influences their public status. They should be given political and legislative rights and exercise the power of choice. Many causes of suppression are faced by them based on education, individuality, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors that influence personality. Its main belief was to provide females the same education, decent lives, and families that males want. The theoretical framework provides a view of how gender inequality can influence humans. Women are an integral part of every society. Women should be equal housemakers, have children, and pursue their careers. Entrance into the political sphere will provoke some change for them. Liberal feminist emphasis on families where male dominance suppresses their femininity. Women are rational members, and children learn gender roles from their family. They get inspiration from family members. The role models can be wisely taken and changed if children are given education, better role models, and motivated to achieve their best. Women of Pakistani societies are considered male property. They are hardly allowed to speak for themselves, children, and if they raise their voice, their status as good women will change. In families, women should be given the freedom to do paid jobs and make decisions of their own choice regarding marriage and childbirth. For a fruitful relationship, there should be equality and flexibility between both genders.

According to Profeta [9], equality between genders will produce favorable effects for the development of the country. Gender equality and development are both interlinked. It is not only men who can play an active part in the stability and development of a country, but also

female equal participation is an equally important part of developmental growth. Women represent half of the nation, and their involvement in the labour force would give fruitful results. Qualified, less corrupt, and more responsible women will bring beneficial gains to a country. Thus, an increase in gender equality will produce diversity, help to increase productive responses, and decrease discrimination.

The study examines the decision-making power and comparison of rural women from extended families and urban women in nuclear settings. The objectives of the present study were the following:

1. To find out the different levels at which women in urban and rural areas make decisions.
2. To find out the participation of urban and rural women in the decision-making process in nuclear and joint families.
3. Finding the relationship between decision-making power and the position of women in household affairs.
4. To find out the Decision-making power women have based on their marital status.

1.1 Research Design and Paradigm

The present research employed a quantitative approach in which data were systematically collected from the field and are depicted in numerical form. For the information, primary as well as secondary sources were reviewed, including journals, books, and different websites related to the data, and the interview schedule was adequately used to get appropriate information. Thus, after understanding, it is described in tabular form.

1.2 Data Collection

The Structured interview schedule was used as a data collection technique, which was considered convenient because not all the women were educated, especially those who live in rural areas. To help them understand the concept better and get the information that is meant to be taken.

1.3 Sampling and Respondents Recruitment

Sampling is known as half of the population selected by the researcher from the whole population, and in this research, Half of the rural and urban married women were selected. A Structured Interview schedule was used due to the family system. Moreover, the Purposive sampling technique was used in the present research. A Structured Interview schedule was constructed to obtain information about women in urban and rural areas because of the limited information about them. So, a simple random technique was applied for reaching urban and rural women. They were helped to better understand the questions based on which

researchers could obtain information that would accomplish the aim of the research. The sample size is limited to a total of 100 respondents, 50 from urban settings of F-7/2 sector and 50 from rural area, Tarlai Kalan, of Islamabad capital territory of Pakistan. This sample size was enough to know the problems that women face in numerous household matters.

In the present research, there was a lack of time to carry it out much better than it is. As the research is a comparative analysis of married women's decision-making power, only women's views were taken; however, men should be taken into account as part of the research. When it comes to opportunities, the researcher's confidence was boosted while taking interviews and moving into the field to collect data, which enables the researcher to carry on the study in an organized way.

Before starting data collection, about 10 formal structured interview schedules were pre-tested, 5 from rural and 5 from urban areas. After pre-testing, a few changes were made to make it more friendly for respondents so that they can give their responses in a better way.

1.4 Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis was done with the help of Statistical Product for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 version, and data were presented in the form of tables. Hypotheses of this study were:

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Category	Urban	Rural	Combined Frequency
Below 20	2	2	4
21-30	8	12	20
31-40	25	14	39
41-50	11	11	22
Above 50	4	11	15
Total	50	50	100

Table No. 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents. While collecting data from rural and urban areas, different women of different ages were interviewed. Where data of urban and rural women was recorded separately as shown in above table and the combined data was also taken Where 3% were below 20 years, 20% women were of 21-30 years age, 38% have age from 31-40, 22% fall in 41-50 age group and 16% were above 50 years. The conclusion of the table showed that the majority of women were in the age of 31-40 years.

Table 2: Employment status of respondents

Category	Urban	Rural	Combined Frequency
Yes	35	11	46
No	15	39	54
Total	50	50	100

Table No. 2 showed the employment status of the respondents from urban, rural, and the whole status of women in this matter. 46% of women were employed, and the remaining 53% were unemployed. The table concludes that few women were employed, and the majority were unemployed.

Table 3: Family Background

Category	Urban	Rural	Overall frequency
Independent	32	24	56
Dependent	18	26	44
Total	50	50	100

Table No. 3 showed that the family background of women who were living before marriage, where 56% of women were independent before marriage, they enjoyed freedom fully, while 44% of women were dependent on their family members before marriage. So, the table concludes that 56% of women were fully independent.

Table 4: Head of family

Category	Urban	Rural	Overall frequency
Father-in law	6	4	20
Mother-in law	4	8	12
Husband	39	23	62
You	4	1	5
Another	20	1	1
Total	50	50	100

Table no. 4 showed the head of family, where 20% of respondents' family head is father-in-law, 12% of respondents' family head is mothers-in-law, 62% of respondents' family head is husband, 5% of Respondents' family head is you, and 1% of respondents' family head is another. The conclusion of the table showed that most family heads are husbands.

Table 5: Access to desired education

Category	Urban	Rural	Overall frequency
To a great extent	34	14	48
To some extent	14	14	28
Not at all	2	22	24
Total	50	50	100

Table no. 5 showed the access to education, where 48% of Respondents have a great extent of education, 28% have some extent of education, and 24% of Respondents have no access to education. The table concludes that the majority of education has a great extent of education.

Table 6: Free will to take part in family affairs

Category	Urban	Rural	Combined Frequency
To a great extent	34	23	57

To some extent	15	16	31
Not at all	1	11	12
Total	50	50	100

Table no.6 showed the free will to participate in family affairs, where 57% of Respondents have free great extent to participate, 31% have some extent to participate, and 12% of Respondents have not at all to participate. The table concludes that the majority of free will has a great extent to participate.

Table 7: Male dominance creates hurdles for females

Category	Frequency Rural	Urban	and	Urban	Rural	Combined Frequency
To a great extent				21	16	37
To some extent				26	22	48
Not at all				3	12	15
Total				50	50	100

The table number. 7 showed that the male dominance creates female hurdles, where 37% of Respondents have a great extent, 48% have some extent in male dominance, and 15% of Respondents have not at all male dominance. The conclusion of the table stated that male dominance, to some extent, creates hurdles.

Table 8: The Nuclear family gives empowerment to women

Category	Frequency Rural	Urban	and	Urban	Rural	Combined Frequency
To a great extent				35	28	63
To some extent				15	15	30
Not at all				0	7	7
Total				50	50	100

Table no. 8 showed that the nuclear family empowers women, where 63% of Respondents have a great extent in empowering women, 30% have some extent, and 9% of respondents have not at all. The nuclear family empowers women. The table concludes that the nuclear family has a great extent in empowering women.

Table 9: Female right to decide on their reproductive health

Category	Frequency Rural	Urban	and	Urban	Rural	Combined Frequency
To a great extent				19	16	35
To some extent				30	31	61
Not at all				1	3	4
Total				50	50	100

Table no. 9 showed the decision women exercise their reproductive rights, where 35% of respondents freely decide about their reproductive rights, 61% stated to some extent, and 4%

not at all. The conclusion of the table showed that the majority of women stated to some extent that they can decide about their reproductive health.

Hypothesis testing

H₁: The hypothesis is that Urban women have more decision-making in nuclear families than rural women have in joint families.

H₀: Urban women have less decision-making in nuclear families than rural women have in joint families.

Table 10 Correlation among decision-making ability of women, dependency, and impediments while making decisions

Category		The final decision of the family	Females are set free to exercise their rights to decide
The final decision of the family	Pearson Correlation	1	-.032
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.751
	N	100	100
Females are set free to exercise their rights to decide	Pearson Correlation	-.032	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.751	
	N	100	100

Table No. 20 showed the correlation among decision-making ability, dependency, and impediments women face in their daily lives.

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The values that have a Pearson Correlation Sig Value are those that are less than 0.05; then there is a correlation among the variables. The conclusion of the table showed that the Pearson correlation value lies between 0.05 and 1, then variables are strongly correlated, and if closer to 1, then it is the perfect correlation value. All the values are near 1 and above 0.05, which suggests that all variables are strongly correlated with each other. Male dominance creates hurdles for females, which is correlated with the final decision of the family, and females are set free to exercise their rights to decide. Male dominance affects the female's rights in making decisions.

Individuals living in the house are affected by the decisions taken in the household because the decisions produce flexibility regarding different matters of the house. Decisions made in the household concerning different matters like education, health, and market purchases impact the members living under one roof differently. Decisions affect the resilience of individuals. Women and men have different priorities. If women have no say in the house,

then men's decisions are valued. Thus, Decision power impacts the resilience power of women's contribution in household or community matters, which also impacts the capacities of children, Satrya & Corps, [10]. Raj [11] argues that women are an important part of every society. Women's participation in different fields of life can contribute to the progress of any nation or society. Mostly, women are just considered to live within the boundaries of their houses; they are not allowed to go out, whereas it is the male who can get access to anything he wants. Moreover, when it comes to decision-making, more power is given to men as compared to women regarding different matters.

2. Discussion

In Pakistan, women are not considered as dominating figures, and it is the male who dominates the society. Women are deprived of their basic rights, and they are not allowed to stand up for their rights. Mostly, it is seen that it is the female who faces a lot of injustice and yet is forced to bow in front of males. For the development, it is the female who also contributes because development is not done by males only. Women are important and talented figures of the nation, whether they belong to rural or urban areas. If their skills are polished and training sessions are arranged for them, they can learn a lot and, as a result, can flourish in society. Besides this, it is hard but true that only a few feminists and some women fight and work for the achievement of their rights, and many, because of cultural and societal norms, have given up.

Gender inequality is seen as an important factor in not allowing women to make decisions about themselves or for their families. In case they are allowed, then under a few terms or conditions designed by the authorized person of the house, they must decide. However, in Pakistani societies, women are deprived due to cultural values and societal structures. For example, Malala Yousafzai, who raises her voice for the educational rights of women and, while living in a dominated society, demands women's rights, raising her voice is considered a crime. She was harmed, and just to stop her from speaking up, people tried to kill her. It is the Pakistani women who face violence of different kinds just for survival, for their kids, and for their families. Their life is not as simple as that of those ladies who live in a country where equality prevails. They are dependent and bound to stay in the four walls of the house, enjoying their life while staying there. Furthermore, they are not allowed to work, and if they do, then they have to face issues like harassment, inequality, and must be stronger than before to achieve their desired aim.

Women's status and role are measured by their education level, employment status, their health status, and participation in different household or affairs beyond household

boundaries. In the present research, Women's decision-making ability is compared to determine whether urban women living in nuclear settings are better decision-makers or rural females who live in joint families. Many indicators contribute to raising her status for the decision-making, such as autonomy, empowerment, Childbirth, Employment status, her previous family background, education status, and participation level.

A comparative analysis among the females of rural and urban area shows that women are not illiterate many have passed graduation, like 53% of women are living in nuclear settings, 46% of women are employed, 55% of women are independent in their life which gives them freedom to exercise their decision-making power, 52% of women have free will to participate in family affairs and only 12% faces fear barrier in making decision. So, as Pakistan is considered a dominant society, 48% of women state that it is the husband who makes the final decision, either within laws or in any of the settings, the dominant male.

Women in Pakistan are facing issues that hinder their abilities in different ways. Furthermore, 53% live in nuclear, 52% urban, 47% joint, and 48% rural, yet it is the male who is the final decider. Women face issues that bind them to stay within the four walls of home, but more importantly, patriarchy is hindering their abilities and forcing them to do what males say and not allow them to practice matters freely.

3. Implications and Future Research

The findings of the study have significant implications, especially in the fields of sociology, addiction studies, drug research, and public health. The study identified that decision-making power is an important factor that can lead to peaceful relations and help in the development of healthy and strong relations. Satisfaction with it can contribute to happy lifestyles, and the study findings showed that both rural and urban women are, to some extent, satisfied with their lives. Whereas hindrance, burden, emotional and physical sickness of women in the household can cause disturbance not only in their own lives but also to the people who are associated with them.

Decision-making is the ability that is significant for the orderly succession of family affairs. Education is important. It should be for everyone. Women should be given free will to get educated in whatever domain they want to; Women of rural areas should be given rights of equality too as enjoyed to some extent by urban women; Concept of early marriages should not be supported, and women should be given freedom to make such important decision for themselves; Mutual understanding provokes happiness So to live happily and peacefully its very important for families; Women participation should be ensured in family or even matters outside from family; Husbands should be made aware of dominancy and the unseen

difficulties that women face because of it; Women should be given freedom to decide instead of being enforced by the decision of family of any other person; Decision about child's life should be made by the parents especially by couple together to remove the gap in them; Women should be given proper rights in their life and should not be taken for granted.

4. Limitations

For every research, there are some limitations that should be kept in mind while doing research, and some opportunities that are fruitful for a researcher. In the present research, there was a lack of time to carry it out much better than it is. As the research is a comparative analysis of married women's decision-making power, only women's views were taken; however, men should be taken into account as part of the research. When it comes to opportunities, the researcher's confidence was boosted while taking interviews and moving into the field to collect data, which enables the researcher to carry on the study in an organized way.

5. Conclusion

Women's empowerment and autonomy are linked to the decision-making ability of women. These indicators help women to participate and ask for the rights that will give them the freedom to walk freely in a world dominated by males. In the context of Urban and rural women, both have the ability and power to decide, but it varies depending on their education, job status, husband's job and position, participation level, sons they give birth to, and many more. The present study says that urban women are more empowered and decision-makers than those who reside in rural areas and under patriarchal settings. In Islamabad sectors, women are working ladies and independent. They faced very few barriers in doing or during their studies, while in the context of rural females, they are not allowed to take part due to cultural and social norms, and if they are allowed to, then it depends on their status, roles, and previous family background.

Women of urban areas are much better than those in rural areas, yet both are the same. They are living in a society that is male-dominated, and all the decisions are finalized through them; even when it comes to themselves, they rely on males. Being employed in socially and culturally constructed pigeonholes cannot be vanished. Women of urban areas are living lives that they wished for the rural women, but in both the settings, males are dominant, and as we know, Pakistan is a patriarchal society, so more time and much work are needed to achieve equality and create an environment where women can live a life of their own.

In our society, religion and cultural norms are so deeply rooted that cutting them out or changing people's minds is quite difficult. The study showed that women's opinions are not

much different, but it depends on their residence, whether they can practice their rights or not. Urban women, as compared to rural women, are not dependent due to the free will they have been given to exercise their right, while rural women do not enjoy such status. Furthermore, the nuclear family gives much empowerment to women. They can make decisions about their reproductive rights and have free will to decide, but the findings illustrate that urban women have more power in this regard than rural women have.

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