



THE ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN FAMILY DECISION MAKING

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Article History

Volume 6, Issue 12, 2024

Received Date: 20 May 2024

Acceptance Date: 28 June 2024

Doi:

10.48047/AFJBS.6.12.2024.2992-3000

ABSTRACT

What this study focuses on is the role played by Muslim women in family decision-making, which is a very important aspect of gender equality yet with minimal research, hence a wide knowledge gap. The paper shall, therefore, explore what influences the decision-making authority of Muslim women and traditional gender roles and religious beliefs that bear on their decisional control and then come up with a few recommendations that will foster steps towards gender equality. In all, 295 Muslim women responded to an interview schedule. The results show that the influence exerted by Muslim women in family decision-making is rather low. Such influence is influenced by traditional gender roles and challenging communication. Several implications of targeted interventions and gender-inclusive reinterpretations of Islamic teachings can be identified from this research. This study contributes to increasing awareness regarding gender equality and empowerment of Muslim women.

Keywords- Muslim women, family decision-making, gender equality, traditional gender roles, Islamic teachings.

INTRODUCTION

One such conceptual framework that gained wide attention over the past few decades is the participation of Muslim women in family decision-making. In the last few decades, the status of women in society has undergone tremendous changes with the rising concept of gender equality. However, the role of a Muslim woman within the family decision-making process seems to come out at the center of many debates and discussions. While many Muslim women have experienced upward mobility, their involvement in family decision-making processes remains negligible. This can be attributed to various factors that continue to perpetuate such gender-based discrimination, including the husband's superiority.

The image of a Muslim woman is changing. Education, job opportunities, urbanization—all these are creating more involvement in public life for women. However, all this change has not translated automatically into increased decision-making within the family. Decisional roles in the family are things that are not easily assumed by Muslim women in society; their opinions and views are given second importance.

The next discussion is done to embark on understanding more about the role of Muslim women in family decision-making, including factors that influence their participation and the impact of their involvement on family well-being. It is expected that through the study, a greater understanding of women's experiences of the complex dynamics of family decision-making among Muslim women will be reached to promote gender equality and social justice.

RELEVANCE OF STUDY

This is an important and timely study as it deals with the social, cultural, and religious relevance of the decision-making power of Muslim women over issues concerning their families. Thus, the study into the determinants of the decision-making power of Muslim women challenges the norm of patriarchal discourse and constructs substantially the same gender and power relations that enjoin in the perpetuation of a status quo of inequality, hence offering a voice to the hitherto marginalized group. The findings and conclusions of this study are, however, going to be the first step toward the empowerment of Muslim women in claiming a stake in their portion of power and authority, thereby promoting gender equity and social justice.

So, it is the research that establishes policy and practice initiatives based on the specific needs of Muslim women and their families, thus laying a strong basis for effective insights for gender-sensitive programs and services. The subtle lines that your study generates about how religion, culture, and gender reciprocally interact underline the resultant need for the promotion of an inclusive interpretative context of Islamic teaching in support of gender equality and women's empowerment. In the end, your study will help flag positive change and add to the well-being of families, improving social justice in terms of inclusive decision-making processes. Thus, your study is of great importance, and it points out the complex dynamics of family decision-making among Muslim women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To establish the extent to which husbands are influencing family decisions.
- How education and employment are affecting the decision-making roles of Muslim women
- The association that exists between communication and the decision-making authority of the Muslim woman
- The effect of traditional gender roles on the empowerment and autonomy of the Muslim woman
- How religious belief impacts the decision-making roles of the Muslim woman

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

- Husbandly influence on all family decisions is expected to be very high; thus, limiting the amount of real decision-making power held by Muslim women.
- The amount of education and employment of Muslim women is expected to be positively correlated with the decisional authority of the woman.
- The decisional authority of Muslim women is expected to be positively correlated with effective spousal communication.
- Traditional gender role expectations are expected to have a negative correlation with the empowerment of autonomy for Muslim women.
- This goes on to show religious beliefs are likely to exert restricted influence in the role of Muslims with regards to women in the decision-making process, with sure positive influence from the Islamic teachings in promoting gender equality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The descriptive research approach was employed in the present study to examine the role of Muslim women in family decision-making in Kanpur City.

Data Collection

Primary Data: In the city of Kanpur, primary data were obtained from 295 respondents of the city by administering a structured interview schedule. The questions in this interview

schedule relate to demographic information, decision-making processes, and the role of Muslim women in family decision-making.

- Secondary Data: Literature was reviewed in the form of journals, books, and reports, which were related to the current aspect.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used; the individuals chosen for the study consisted of 295 Muslim ladies from Kanpur City. The sample respondents were chosen based on their willingness to be a part of this study.

Data Analysis

The information that was gathered using the interview schedule was tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Resultant data was interpreted to track patterns, trends, and themes about the role of Muslim women in family decision-making.

Data Collection Tool

For this study, the interview schedule was the primary tool in gathering data within a research. The questions to be brought forward were open-ended and closed-ended, meant to bring forward demographic information about the respondents, their decision-making processes, and Muslim women's roles in family decision-making. Data Collection Procedure The data collection shall be in the form of a face-to-face interview with the respondents. The Trained data collectors will administer interview schedules to the target population to ensure that the respondents understand the questions and provide the correct information.

Data collection procedure

For this research, the interview schedule was the principal tool in collecting data within a study. These closed-ended questions bring to light demographic information about the respondents, their decision-making processes, and Muslim women's roles in family decision-making.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Olyan 2020: Its proof was laid down by the study from Olyan, which was conducted in 2020, based on the title "Status of Demographic, Socio-Economic, and Health Inequality." Based on the study, compared to the other religious groups, Muslim women in India show large socio-economic disparities, including educational and economic inequalities. Muslim women are relatively behind in education, with less participation in household economic decision-making and relatively lower participation in work as compared to their counterparts from other minority and majority groups. This illustrates that access to education and economic resources is highly inequitable for Muslim women compared to women of other religions. Muslim families exhibit a poor level of wealth relative to other minority communities. Their cash earnings are indeed less than those of the husband. They also do not enjoy much freedom outside the home and, hence, are less likely to be accorded a chance to make important decisions in the home. Besides, they have a higher fertility rate compared to women in other religious groups.

Kustav 2012: The article "A National Study of the Prevalence and Correlates of Domestic Violence Among Women in India," tries to estimate the national prevalence rate of domestic violence in India from the demographic and socioeconomic status of the domestic violence victims. Material and method: This was a cross-sectional national survey using the Indian Family Survey 3, conducted in 124385 persons of reproductive age from all 29 member states. The study found that Muslim women were the victims of domestic violence, largely due to their poor economic background, working conditions, and the controlling behavior of their husbands.

Haq 2013 Details regarding the intersectionality of gender and informs of identity: While citing her article entitled Dilemmas and Challenges Facing Women in India, she said that

women have always been marginalized in terms of extending their facilities related to accessing education and access to good health services. The personal and professional development of women is also given less importance. The economic status of women is on quite a low note, and their participation in the business sector is pretty low. Hence, they have fewer opportunities when it comes to the prospect of jobs available for them. That needs to be paid attention to. So that the condition of women could be improved.

P. Singh and Patnaik in their paper *The Economic Status of Women in India*, published in the year 2018: Study, titled 'Paradox of Paid-Unpaid Work and Poverty', says there has been a marked decline in women's engagement in paid activities. In the course of the study, Pushpendra Singh and Falguni Pathak found that the unpaid work activities of women have increased significantly, with the increase in unpaid activities being more intense for women who are less educated, marginalized, and belong to poor families.

In his book *The Subjugation of Women*, Mill (2016) expressed his views regarding the subjugation of women and said that women do not have the rights and positions that men have in society. Society is dominated by men, and women have to live their lives under them. In this article, Stuart Mill has also highlighted the atrocities against women and how women are treated in a male-dominated country, and the author has tried to establish new dimensions in this regard.

Qadri Aaqib 2020, in his paper "Perspective on the Status of Muslim Women in India: Challenges," pointed out that Muslim women are educationally, politically underrepresented, and socio-economically the most lagging in the country, which means a problematic situation. Muslim women are still very much depressed and backward relative to their number in social, economic, political, and educational life, in proportion to the advancement and progress made in modern India. All these reports also show that they have not been able to grow up like others in their society. However, Sayyed Aqib Qadri underlines that, in the course of this research, two chief reasons for the low status of Muslim women have come to the fore: 1. The social status of Muslim women is owed to the power of males in a patriarchal society. 2. Women's discrimination due to gender inequality, which is the primary reason for the low socio-economic status of Muslim women.

Shah and Khurshid 2019 in their journal *Muslim Womanhood, Education, and Empowerment: Ethnographic Reflections from Pakistan and India* establish that on viewing the social interaction of women in Muslim society, Muslim women emerge to be the oppressed and oppressed classes within their patriarchal society. This study will be based on the personal experience of educated Muslim women in Pakistan and India to understand that even Muslim-educated women were unable to achieve complete freedom in a patriarchal society. The patriarchal mindset dominates the education of these women and does not allow them to stand before men.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Demographics

Most respondents (75.5%) are between 25-40 years old with the highest percentage (26.77%) being in the 31-35 age range. Among the respondents, the age range of 25-30 percent is 25.08 percent while 25.42 percent are between 36-40 years. The smallest proportion (20.67%) is 41 years or older. Most of the respondents (55.92%) have been married for 5-16 years, 30.5% for 5-10 years, and 25.42% for 11-16 years. The 17-22 years range is 24.06%, while 20% are married from 23-28 years. A large fraction of the respondents 38.98% lack literacy. 32.2% of the population have completed high school or above and 20.33% have a bachelor's or master's degree. The lowest percentage (8.47%) has completed further schooling. 61.01% of the population consists of housewives. Of the workforce, 25.42% are part-time and 13.55% are full-time. There is no entrepreneur in the sample.

Age of Respondent

Serial number	Age	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	25-30	80	25.08
2	31-35	79	26.77
3	36-40	75	25.42
4	41- older	61	20.67

Number of years married

Serial number	Marriage years	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	5-10 years	90	30.50
2	11-16 years	75	25.42
3	17-22 years	71	24.06
4	23-28 years	59	20

Education level

Serial number	Education	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	Illiterate	115	38.98
2	High school or above	95	32.20
3	Bachelors/ masters	60	20.33
4	Higher	25	8.47

Occupation of Respondent

Serial number	Work type	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	Home maker	180	61.01
2	Part time worker	75	25.42
3	Full time worker	40	13.55
4	entrepreneur	0	0

Family dynamics

The majority (64.4%) of respondents live in nuclear families. Joint families constitute 23.72% while extended families make up 11.86%.

Husbands play an important role in decision-making, with 57.62% of respondents citing them as the key decision-makers. Respondents (26.77%) and both equally (13.55%) also have a significant say in decision-making. In-laws have a minimal role, with only 2.03% citing them as key decision-makers. The majority (50.54%) described their relationship as "good" or "very good". However, a significant proportion (32.20%) report a "bad" relationship. The remaining 17.28% described their relationship as "reasonable".

The family structure of the respondent

Serial number	Family structure	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Nuclear	195	64.40
2	Joint	70	23.72
3	extended	35	11.86

key decision-makers

Serial number	Decision maker	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Myself	79	26.77
2	My husband	170	57.62

3	Both equally	40	13.55
4	In-laws	6	2.03

Relationship of respondent with husband and family

Serial number	Relationship level	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Very good	60	20.38
2	Good	89	30.16
3	Fair	51	17.28
4	poor	95	32.20

Decision-making roles

Domestic work (57.62%) and childcare (20.33%) are the most common decisions made by respondents. Financial judgments (8.47%) and religious judgments (13.55%) are less prevalent.

Only 22.03% of the respondents are "very satisfied" or delighted with their role in family decision-making. The slight majority (51.82%) are either "satisfied" (27.79%) or "neutral" (33.89%). A significant proportion (16.27%) are "dissatisfied" with their role. Financial decisions (195 respondents) are the most common area where respondents feel they should have more input. Childcare decisions (80 respondents) are the second most common area. None of the respondents think they should have much input into household chores. Only 20 percent of respondents believe they should have more input into religious decisions.

Personal decision-making of Respondent in family dynamic

Serial number	Type of decision-making	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Household chores	170	57.62
2	Childcare	60	20.33
3	Financial	25	8.47
4	religious	40	13.55

Respondent perspectives on family decision-making

Serial number	Status	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Very satisfied	65	22.03
2	Satisfied	82	27.79
3	Neutral	100	33.89
4	dissatisfied	48	16.27

Respondent's Lack of input in decision-making

Serial number	Decision type	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Financial	195	66.10
2	Religious	20	6.77
3	Household chores	0	0
4	childcare	80	27.11

Religious and cultural influence

Only 12.54% of the respondents report that faith significantly influenced their role in the family. Decision making. The slight majority report that there is some or little. Finally 26.44 percent exercise an influence in their belief. Then, 44.06 percent say their faith has No Influence. Only 27.11% of the respondents answered that the specific Islamic teachings or

cultural Traditions influence their decision-making responsibilities. A big majority, 72.88% report no Effect.

Religious influence in family decision-making

Serial number	Level of influence	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Significantly	37	12.54
2	Somewhat	50	16.94
3	Not very much	78	26.44
4	Not at all	130	44.06

Cultural influence on decision making

Serial number	Response	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Yes	80	27.11
2	no	215	72.88

Communication and Collaboration

Only 21.01% of respondents report very effective communication with their spouse and family members about decisions. The slight majority (48.12%) report effective (27.11%) or fair (30.16%) communication. A significant proportion (21.68%) report ineffective (10.16%) or very ineffective (11.52%) communication. Only 13.55% of respondents discuss important decisions daily with their spouses. The slight majority (46.47%) discuss decisions weekly (16.94%), monthly (15.93%), or rarely (33.22%). A significant proportion (20.33%) never discuss important decisions with their spouse.

Respondent's communication with their husband and family

Serial number	Level of communication	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	Very effective	62	21.01
2	Effective	80	27.11
3	Fair	89	30.16
4	ineffective	30	10.16
5	Very ineffective	34	11.52

Important discussion with husband on decision-making

Serial number	Frequency of decision	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	Daily	40	13.55
2	Weekly	50	16.94
3	Monthly	47	15.93
4	Rarely	98	33.22
5	never	60	20.33

Challenges and Empowerment

A significant majority of respondents (78.64%) have faced challenges in asserting their role in family decision-making. Only 21.35% have not faced the challenges.

Only 21.01% of the respondents felt very empowered in making a decision. The slight majority (41.01%) feel empowered (20%) or neutral (29.49%). A significant proportion (29.49%) feel powerless (16.61%) or very null (12.88%).

Challenges faced by respondents in family decision-making

Serial number	Response	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	Yes	232	78.64
2	No	63	21.35

Respondent's level of empowerment in making decisions

Serial number	Level of empowerment	Number of Respondent	percentage
1	Very empowered	62	21.01
2	Empowered	59	20
3	Neutral	87	29.49
4	Disempowered	49	16.61
5	Very disempowered	38	12.88

A significant majority of respondents (78.64%) have faced challenges in asserting their role in family decision-making. Only 21.35% have not faced the challenges.

Only 21.01% of the respondents felt very empowered in making a decision. The slight majority (41.01%) feel empowered (20%) or neutral (29.49%). A significant proportion (29.49%) feel powerless (16.61%) or very null (12.88%).

CONCLUSION

Husbands are the ones who retain ultimate decision-making power in Muslim households, which again restricts the role of Muslim women in the area of finance. In addition, this leads to cases in which a woman's opinion is undermined and ruled out when it comes to making important decisions about the family, which in turn provides them a feeling of less independence and more powerlessness in the household. As can be seen in the reporting of the respondents, the dominance of traditional gender roles still prevails in the text; the majority of the instances are decisions about childcare and household duties. This shows the continued expectation of gendered norms within society. These deeply placed gender roles limit the involvement of women in the decision-making processes; they also command rigid gender roles that stand in the way of achieving gender equality.

In these households, one key challenge identified that is a barrier to effective decision-making is the presence of communication issues, with many participants feeling that this meant there was never any kind of fruitful discussion with their partners about important matters. This lack of communication not only limits the flow of information but also sustains gender-based decision dynamics, which then becomes an impediment to the development of collective decisions. To increase the empowerment levels of women in Muslim households, there is a need to increase autonomy and authority in decision-making since current perceptions do not indicate the presence of feelings of helplessness or minimal empowerment in the decision-making processes.

This would support earlier evidence that religious teachings do not drive gender-based decision-making dynamics considering that faith minimally influences decision-making roles. It implies that decision-making roles are influenced by factors other than religion, where cultural practices become of greater influence in this aspect. Furthermore, findings from the study indicate that decision-making roles are not very much influenced by either working or educational levels, with the general argument being that mere economic empowerment cannot increase women's decision-making roles. It becomes, therefore, most critical to further explore the difficult interplay of cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors to untangle these complexities in and around women's decision-making autonomy within Muslim households.

Thus, this result is vivid, gender-based dynamics need to be taken into consideration, and Muslim women need to rise to higher power and more autonomy in their decision-making capacity. This can happen by—

- Education and economic empowerment
- Developing communication and collaboration skills
- Working against traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes
- Supporting Islamic teachings that support gender equality and gender justice
- Pushing for men to support women's decision-making role

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