

# **Women Status in South Asian Developing Nations: A Multicountry Analysis**

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## **Abstract-**

Around the world, many women continue to experience low level of autonomy. The study aims to assess woman status in South Asian countries which are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan using their latest DHS data. Women's participation either alone or jointly in household and financial decisions is considered as an indicator of women's autonomy in decision making. Multivariate ordered logistic regression is used to examine and explore the status of women and its socio demographic differentials. Women who were employed and educated had a stronger say in household decision making than women who did not work and not educated. Rural and poor women were less likely to be involved in decision making than urban or rich women. It is found that with increase in woman age, the decision making power is increasing.

**Keywords-** woman autonomy, gender issues, decision making, empowerment, multivariate ordered logistic regression

## **Background-**

All humans enjoy some fundamental rights. With socialization some gender discriminatory rules are set which diminish the rights of women. If we look back in the history, at the time of cave men there were no discrimination and both men and women hunt for their survival together. In modern era, we need to fight for women empowerment and gender equality. Women as a category and South Asia as a region for analysis brings up the issue of heterogeneity vs. homogeneity (Stromquist, 1998; Agarwal, 1996; HDSA, 2000). Autonomy defines as the capacity for a woman to achieve well-being and a role in decision-making. Literatures have suggested that women's decision-making autonomy is closely linked to reproductive and child health outcomes. South Asian women and their status is being assessed here to highlight the similarities in the conditions faced by women despite the diversities stemming from class, religion, culture and locality.

## **Objectives-**

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the status of women among currently married or cohabiting women in South Asian developing countries.
2. To identify the socio demographic differentials that affect woman autonomy across countries.
3. To explore the determinants behind complete woman autonomy in South Asian developing countries.

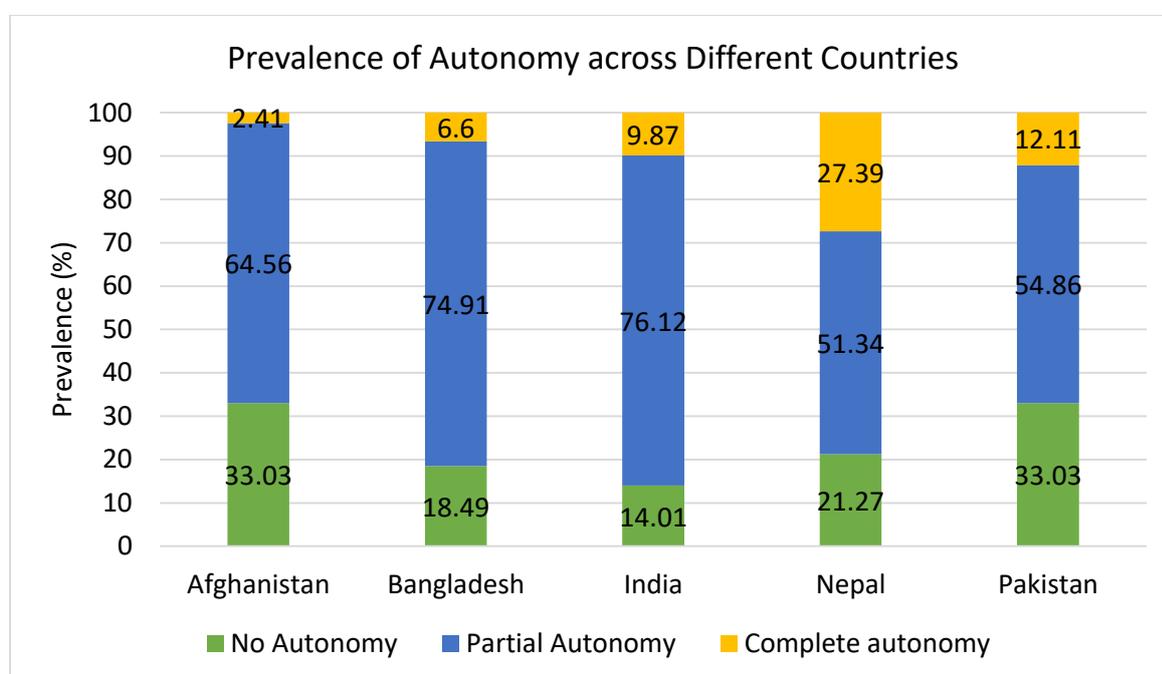
## **Methodology-**

Our study is predominantly based on latest DHS data of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Woman Autonomy is defined here as the relative decision-making power of a woman to her husband in household and financial decision-making settings in South Asian Nation.

Based on the indicators selected for woman autonomy the responses are scaled from 0-10. Autonomy is measured as 0 “no autonomy”, 1-5 “partial autonomy” and 6-10 “complete autonomy” based on direct measures. The cross-tabulations are generated between proportion of woman who experience no autonomy, partial autonomy or complete autonomy, and their sociodemographic characteristics. Multivariate ordered logistic regression is used to estimate the likelihood of a woman participation in decision-making according to her sociodemographic characteristics, using odds ratios, 95% confidence intervals, and P values for OR, across different South Asian developing countries.

## Results-

Complete women autonomy is found to be highest in Nepal (27.39%) amongst all five countries, with least in Afghanistan (2.41%).



| Autonomy         | Afghanistan | Bangladesh | India      | Nepal      | Pakistan   |
|------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                  | Odds Ratio  | Odds Ratio | Odds Ratio | Odds Ratio | Odds Ratio |
| <b>Woman Age</b> |             |            |            |            |            |
| <b>15-19®</b>    |             |            |            |            |            |
| <b>20-24</b>     | 1.183*      | 1.701*     | 1.502*     | 2.230*     | 1.428*     |
| <b>25-29</b>     | 1.556*      | 2.531*     | 2.005*     | 4.970*     | 2.101*     |
| <b>30-34</b>     | 1.812*      | 3.249*     | 2.479*     | 7.778*     | 3.043*     |
| <b>35-39</b>     | 2.311*      | 3.869*     | 2.931*     | 9.154*     | 4.100*     |

|  |        |         |         |        |        |
|--|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| <b>40-44</b>                           | 2.346* | 3.607*  | 3.159*  | 8.955* | 5.208* |
| <b>45-49</b>                           | 2.835* | 2.943*  | 3.344*  | 8.477* | 5.474* |
| <b>Woman Education</b>                 |        |         |         |        |        |
| no education®                          |        |         |         |        |        |
| <b>primary</b>                         | 1.410* | 1.141** | 1.234*  | 1.190* | 1.311* |
| <b>secondary</b>                       | 1.752* | 1.185*  | 1.367*  | 1.374* | 1.489* |
| <b>higher</b>                          | 2.869* | 1.312*  | 1.753*  | 1.583* | 1.801* |
| <b>Sex of Head of Household</b>        |        |         |         |        |        |
| male ®                                 |        |         |         |        |        |
| <b>female</b>                          | 1.598* | 4.632*  | 1.901*  | 5.059* | 4.499* |
| <b>Wealth Quintile</b>                 |        |         |         |        |        |
| Poorest ®                              |        |         |         |        |        |
| <b>poorer</b>                          | 0.840* | 1.104** | 1.090*  | 1.230* | 1.547* |
| <b>middle</b>                          | 0.798* | 1.186*  | 1.163*  | 1.442* | 1.633* |
| <b>richer</b>                          | 0.853* | 1.275*  | 1.138*  | 1.460* | 1.533* |
| <b>richest</b>                         | 0.963  | 1.270*  | 1.066** | 1.916* | 1.413* |
| <b>Place of Residence</b>              |        |         |         |        |        |
| Urban®                                 |        |         |         |        |        |
| <b>Rural</b>                           | 0.888* | 0.745*  | 0.874*  | 0.786* | 0.820* |
| <b>Current Working Status of Woman</b> |        |         |         |        |        |
| no ®                                   |        |         |         |        |        |
| <b>yes</b>                             | 2.897* | 3.310*  | 2.655*  | 1.531* | 4.275* |

Note: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.1

® Reference Category

The above table shows the ordered logistic regression results of woman autonomy along with socio demographic characteristics of the population which is used to analyse the impact of socio demographic factors on woman autonomy. As the dependent variable was following a particular order as no, partial and complete, so it was more appropriate to use ordered logistic regression for the analysis.

As it can be seen in case of India, when age increases from 15-19 to 20-24, the odds of no autonomy vs. combined partial and complete autonomy are 1.5 times higher, given other variables held constant. Similarly, in other countries the odds of no autonomy vs. combined partial and complete autonomy increases with women age as compared to the reference category. In Afghanistan, the rise in odds of no autonomy with education is highest. Thus, it could be concluded that with the increase in woman age the autonomy increases. Similar can be seen in other countries too. In Nepal, women in female headed households enjoy more freedom in decision making as compared to the male headed households. In comparison with non-working female, among working females the odds of no autonomy vs. combined partial and complete autonomy is 4.3 times higher in Pakistan, and 1.5 times higher in Nepal. In case of India, Afghanistan and

Bangladesh for working women the odds of no autonomy vs. partial and complete autonomy are 2.6 times, 2.9 times and 3.3 times respectively higher as compared to non-working women. Wealth quintile has significant impact on autonomy in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

**Conclusion-** South Asian women face great disadvantage in decision making. Our analysis revealed current working status play a major role in decision-making participation. Rural and less educated women are less likely involved in decision making. Status and autonomy are low in young women and rise with age. The current situation can be improved by promoting higher education, and gainful employment for women, while taking into account the family and social structures that lead to inequalities.