

# Dimensions of Women's Autonomy and Family Influence: A Statistical Study

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**Abstract:** *Women's participation in decision making process and their autonomy are equally important components of women empowerment along with access to resources. The present study has tried to analyze the decision making (self & Jointly) w.r.t. 'Control over finance', 'Household decisions' and 'Freedom of Movement' on the given indicators for the working women in Mumbai (suburb) city. The study included information from 1387 selected working women from Joint and Nuclear families. It is found that, significant change in decision making on purchase personal things and spending husband income in Joint families but not w.r.t. decision on Investments. Autonomy is extended to women on 'Holding spiritual and social functions in house' though their freedom to go out is limited. Difference in proportion of women taking self-decision on freedom is significantly more in Joint-families w.r.t. their career, family tour picnic, freedom to go out alone as well as with friends & colleagues, and support to parents. The study suggests that, Joint family system is good for the working women particular in the city like Mumbai. Hence, it can be concluded that, economic empowerment makes the women more concerned about their participation in decision making irrespective of the family type they live.*

**Keywords:** decision-making, Women's autonomy, Joint & Nuclear families, self-decision, Joint decision

## 1. Introduction

Indian women have been gradually coming out of traditional roles and entering into the male dominated areas. In recent years the role and status of the women have changed tremendously. With increasing female education and more liberty for their rights and privileges, women's attitude towards their stereotyped role is changing. Their participation in education and work place has also led to their increased socio-familial roles.

Women's autonomy in decision making is the pre-requisite to women empowerment. All over the world, role of women in decision making is always limited irrespective of her religion, education and economic status. Some examples and evidences do appear in the literature. The situations women get an autonomy are mostly of less important and given out of responsibility. For example, decision on cooking or education to children where men do not want to take responsibility. With the spread of education and high cost of living, women are required to join the workforce and contribute the family income. With access to economy and exposure to world outside their participation in decision making process has become significant.

Autonomy in broad sense defined as, 'One's control over his/her life'. Empowerment of women demands the decision making power to women on their personal life as well decisions at family and society level along with access to resources. Women's autonomy can be viewed as the control of women over their own lives, materials, access to knowledge and information, having equal say with their husbands or partners on matters affecting themselves and their families. It can also be equated with the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraint on physical mobility and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families (Nigatu, 2014). (Bloom et al 2001) defined and studied women's autonomy in three

dimensions: control over finance, extent of freedom of movement and decision-making power. The study shows that, Safeguarding women's rights such as access to land, credit, and increasing the number of women benefiting from government programs and strategies, giving women leadership training have been the strategic turning points for women's autonomy (Ethiopia: FDRE and MoFED; 2010). The present study on working women in Mumbai suburban district is focused to analyze the working women's autonomy related to the extent of independent decision making, freedom on physical mobility and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families.

### 1.1. Operational Definitions:

- **Women:** Since the study is based on working women, 'women' referred to working women if not stated.
- **Women Autonomy:** It is the reflection of women's degree of freedom, relative to men, regarding control over financial resources (economic autonomy); freedom of movement (physical autonomy); opportunity to participate in decisions (decision-making autonomy) about maternal and child health care utilization.
- **Decision Making Power:** the ability of women to make decision on what to do for their own and children's health care need.
- **Self-decision:** Decision taken by women alone without consulting spouse or other family member.
- **Joint-decision:** Decision taken by women with her husband jointly.
- **Present decision:** Participation of women in decision making at present period i.e. year 2015
- **Past decision:** Participation of women in decision making before 10 years.
- **Freedom of movement:** the women's ability to move to health care facility without seeking permission from other adult (husband's/partner or someone else) for their own and children's health care.

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- **Control over Financial resources:** women's access to sources of money (her own earning, husband's/partner's earning and other sources) and ability to spend it without consulting anyone for their own and children's health care concern.

## 2. Review of Literature

Nigatu et al (2014) conducted a community based study on 706 women with under-five child from Gobadistrict of Ethiopia was conducted in March 2011. The study revealed that,

- Women with employed husband were more likely autonomous than women with unemployed husband. This may be due to accumulated effect of family income.
- The study reveals that, more than 50% of the women have less control on finance.
- Household income, employed husband and being in an extended family structure have positive association with autonomy level of women.
- Knowledge and attitude are influential factors to women's autonomy

**Self Sharmishta, (2015)** studied the perception difference between spouses w.r.t. female autonomy in household decision-making differs and the factors that, explain the similarities and/or differences in such perceptions between husbands and wives. The analysis of household survey data from the Nepal Living Standard Survey III for 2010-2011 revealed that,

- Very few women believed to have sole autonomy in taking non-economic decisions
- A good proportion of women take financial decisions with their husband
- Age of husband and presence of mother-in-law affects the autonomy level of women

The study states the importance of women working and urbanization in order to improve the perception of women autonomy. Whereas having more sons and being a family head have positive impact on the women's autonomy.

**Mankani and Yenagi (2012)** carried out a study on working and non-working (90 each) women to study their mental health status and factor affecting the same. The study used six dimension indicators; positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, autonomy, group oriented attitude and environmental mastery. The study finds that,

- There is significant relation of age and education of working women with; perception of reality, integration of personality, group oriented attitude and overall mental health of working women.
- Social participation has improved the mental health of all the women, working as well as non-working.
- Housewives in rural area and working women in urban area had better mental health compare to their counterpart

## 3. Objectives Hypothesis & Methodology

### 3.1. Objectives

The present study has following specified objectives.

- To measure and analyze change in autonomy level of working women in Mumbai suburban district
- To evaluate the level of Freedom of Movement of working women in Mumbai suburban city
- To identify most influential factors that affects the autonomy of working women

### 3.2 Hypothesis

Family background affects the autonomy level of working women. Autonomy level is measured in terms of proportion of women participate (by Self or Jointly) in decision making process.

Economic empowerment increases the autonomy of working women

## 4. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Socio economic development of a community demands the active participation of women is very essential and it compels the policy makers to execute the legal provisions of equality into practice which only remains on paper otherwise. The study is carried out for working women in Mumbai suburban district of state Maharashtra. *The main focus of the study is to discuss the role of working women in Household Decision Making and autonomy in freedom of movement.*

The main objective of the study is to assess the level of autonomy available to working women w.r.t. their financial independence, freedom of movement and participation in decision making.

The present study included only working women in Mumbai suburb. Hence, there is a scope for including all women entrepreneurs of other life statuses for better derived results. The data given by some of the respondents relating to the financial aspects like monthly income, expenditure & savings may affect the result as the data were based on their estimates and guess work. The information on decision making and freedom available to respondent is subject to self-perception and belief and hence should not be generalize for other population, however the study will draw a line of reference for other researchers to carry out study in the same area or different part of India.

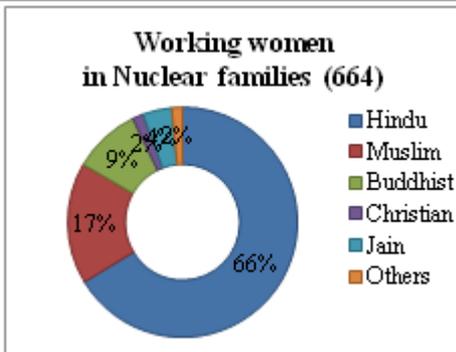
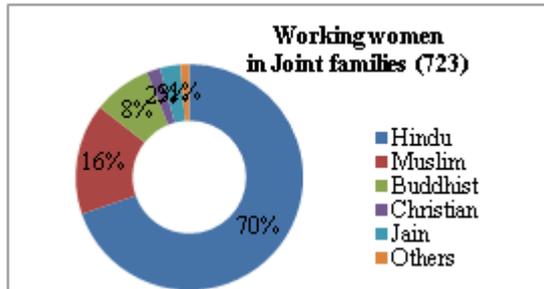
**Data Collection:** The primary data was collected on 1500 respondents of which only 1387 were found dually filled and correct for analysis purpose. The questionnaire elicited information on the following major issues related to working women in study area- i) Socio-economic background of the respondent, ii) Women's participation in household decision making, iii) Control over finance (Financial autonomy) of women and iv) Freedom of movement.

## 5. Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Socio-economic Characteristics of respondents

**Table 1:** Working women by Religion & Type of family

Religion	No of working women		
	Joint Family	Nuclear Family	Total
Hindu	504	440	944
Muslim	115	114	229
Buddhist	60	63	123
Christian	14	10	24
Jain	21	27	48
Others	9	10	19
Total	730	664	1387



**Figure 1:** Working women in Joint & Nuclear families by Religion they follow

**Table 2:** Working women by Education & Occupation

Education level	Occupation (Type of work)			Total
	Service	Self-employed	Business	
None	72	88	0	160
SSC	139	74	7	220
HSC	298	96	11	405
Graduate	328	57	19	404
PG	183	15	0	198
Total	1020	330	37	1387

- Highest percentage of working women is in service- 73.54% (this includes the job like Housekeeping, Nurse, Maid, Teacher, Banker etc.) followed by 23.79% Self-employed and only 2.67% in Business. This shows the lack of entrepreneurship among the women irrespective of Caste and Religion.
- Only 160(11.54%) have education level below S.S.C. (equivalent to NONE) at the same time 198(14.28%) working women have highest education level i.e. Post-Graduation (PG)
- In total 1007(72.61%) working women have education level equivalent to H.S.C and above.

**Table 3:** Working women by Age & Income level

Age in years	Monthly Income (in 000Rs.)					
	Below10	11 to 20	21to 30	31to40	40+	Total
Below 25	81	62	29	0	2	174
26to 35	368	209	79	14	24	694
36to 45	245	87	59	14	43	448
46+	36	16	7	0	12	71
Total	730	374	174	28	81	1387

- Maximum 694 (50%) are in the Age-group 26 to 35years followed 448 (32.29%) in the Age-group 36 to 45 years
- Maximum 730 (52.63% more than Half) earn below Rs.10000/- per month include working women in Service in highest number
- About 80% “more than three quarter” earn below Rs.20000/- per month
- Only 20.41% earn more than Rs.20000/- per month
- (Only 28 (2.01%) earn in the range of Rs.31000/- to Rs.40000/-). Whereas, 81(5.83%) earn income above Rs.40000/- per month.

This shows that, most of the working women are in Lower income group. Hence, we can say that, the sample represents working women from lower income group.

Decision-making Analysis: Score on decision making was counted on,Self-decision and Joint-decision making for Joint and Nuclear families over Present & Past (10 years before) period.

**Table 4:** Decision Making count (Present & Past) in Joint & Nuclear families

Determinants of Autonomy	Self-decision count (Present & Past)		
	Period	Joint Family	Nuclear Family
Control over finance	Present	540	490
	Past	357	369
On purchase of your own needs	Present	201	198
	Past	148	152
On investment (Savings, purchase shares etc.)	Present	148	133
	Past	91	91
Purchasing of Assets for own (House, Car etc.)	Present	441	342
	Past	304	247
Support to parents (by giving money or taking care)	Present	224	239
	Past	129	194
Spending husband's income	Present	258	239
	Past	133	186
Freedom of movement	Present	334	247
	Past	190	194
Going and staying with parents or siblings	Present	460	296
	Past	391	293
Going out with friend/s & colleague(s)	Present	308	171
	Past	289	205
Permission to Go out alone	Present	182	122
	Past	133	91
Permission to Go out with friend(s)	Present	365	395
	Past	258	293
Decision making power (Household decisions & career)	Present	228	315
	Past	175	262
Family type you are living (Joint & Nuclear family)	Present	163	141
	Past	91	122

Big household purchases (TV, Fridge, Mobile etc.)	Present	106	137
	Past	87	84
Personal health (visit to Doctor, Hospital etc.)	Present	315	353
	Past	255	293
Holding spiritual, social and functions in house?	Present	342	274
	Past	160	152
Continue with higher education	Present	426	312
	Past	270	247
Nature & place of job	Present	357	289
	Past	251	224

**Table 5: Joint-Decision Making count (Present & Past) in Joint & Nuclear families**

Determinants of Autonomy	Joint-decision count (Present & Past)		
	Period	Joint Family	Nuclear Family
Control over finance	Present	106	42
	Past	114	57
On purchase of your own needs	Present	198	133
	Past	194	125
On investment (Savings, purchase shares etc.)	Present	221	156
	Past	209	152
Purchasing of Assets for own (House, Car etc.)	Present	91	118
	Past	118	122
Support to parents (by giving money or taking care)	Present	255	171
	Past	251	159
<b>Freedom of movement</b>			
Going and staying with parents or siblings	Present	168	114
	Past	220	152
Going out with friend/s & colleague(s)	Present	84	125
	Past	190	106
Permission to Go out alone	Present	72	42
	Past	114	49
Permission to Go out with friend(s)	Present	76	38
	Past	171	72
<b>Decision making power (Household decisions &amp; career)</b>			
Family tour/picnic/outing	Present	175	129
	Past	179	122
Children education & health (School, Tuitions)	Present	167	84
	Past	206	106
Extra coaching or other Activities for children	Present	175	95
	Past	197	126
Family type you are living (Joint & Nuclear family)	Present	221	209
	Past	221	205
Big household purchases (TV, Fridge, Mobile etc.)	Present	217	121
	Past	213	148
Personal health (visit to Doctor, selecting Hospital etc.)	Present	141	61
	Past	155	95
Holding spiritual, social and functions in house?	Present	156	140
	Past	182	144
Continue with higher education	Present	117	121
	Past	178	103
Nature & place of job	Present	95	91
	Past	182	141

## 5.2 Percentage change on Decision-making

### On Control over finance

Max change (73.64%) is seen on 'Spending husband income' (Table-6) in Joint families which is Min (23.2%) in Nuclear families. This shows that, in Joint families women claim more autonomy on husband income. The reason for this could be that, in Joint families other families members like in-laws also put claim on this income. On the other hand

in Nuclear families women do not have this fear. However, in Nuclear families 46.15% (max) change is observed on decision making w.r.t. Purchasing of Assets for own reflects women's the control over finance. At the same time women's self-decision sees minimum change of 35.81% w.r.t. 'Making Investments' in Joint families because there are other family members who play a role in taking decision.

**Table 6: Percentage growth on Decision count in Joint & Nuclear families over 10 years**

Percentage growth on decision making count	Self-decision		Joint-decision	
	Joint	Nuclear	Joint	Nuclear
<b>Control over finance</b>				
On purchase of your own needs	51.26	32.79	37.15	24.88
On investment (Savings, purchase shares etc.)	35.81	30.26	16.67	19.49
Purchasing of Assets for own (House, Car etc.)	62.64	46.15	23	18.93
Support to parents (by giving money or taking care)	45.07	38.46	26.07	24.66
Spending husband's income	73.64	23.2	26.05	16.15
<b>Freedom of movement</b>				
Going and staying with parents or siblings	93.98	28.49	20.68	4.44
Going out with friend/s & colleague(s)	75.79	27.32	10	24
Permission to Go out alone	17.65	1.02	5.35	-1.17
Permission to Go out with friend(s)	6.57	-16.59	-16.52	-24.55
<b>Decision making power (Household decisions &amp; career)</b>				
Familytour, picnic&outing	36.84	34.07	14.42	17.84
Children education & health (School, Tuitions)	41.47	34.81	14.66	20.05
Extra coaching or other Activities for children	30.29	20.23	8.33	5.67
Family type you are living (Joint/Nuclear)	79.12	15.57	23.08	7.03
Big household purchases (TV, Fridge, Mobile etc.)	21.84	63.1	7.67	11.21
Personal health (visit to Doctor, selecting Hospital etc.)	23.53	20.48	11.22	6.7
Holding any spiritual, social functions in house	113.75	80.26	45.61	39.86
Continue with higher education	57.78	26.32	21.21	23.71
Nature & place of job	42.23	29.02	4.39	4.11

With respect to Joint-decision making, maximum change is observed in both Joint & Nuclear families on 'Purchase of own needs' which reflects the involvement in taking financial decisions. Whereas here again percentage change on 'Investment decisions' in Joint families is minimum for which we can say that, it is a family decision. The minimum change is also seen on 'Spending husband income' in Nuclear families as similar to self-decision change.

### On Freedom of Movement:

Max change is seen on Going and staying with parents or siblings in both Joint as well as Nuclear families also by Joint decisions. Whereas, w.r.t. 'Going out with friends' the

change is minimum reflecting the restricted 'Freedom of movement' for women in all the families.

On Decision making Power (Household decisions & career):  
 Max change is observed on 'Holding spiritual and social functions in house' in all the families. This reflects the autonomy extended to women by the families as a result of their contribution in family income, though they do not get the freedom to go out with friends.

The minimum change (23.53%) and (20.23%) is seen w.r.t. Self-decision making on 'Personal health' in Joint families and 'Extra coaching & other activities for children' in Nuclear families respectively. Though we cannot give specific reason for low change on 'Extra coaching to children', minimum change on 'Personal health' can be explained as in city like Mumbai having a 'Family doctor' is a common practice. Hence, women visit to 'Family doctor' as a natural choice unless the problem calls for special attention.

### 5.3 Significance of difference in Proportion

**Table 7: Decision Making Count (Present) with Family type**

Determinants of autonomy	Self-decision		Joint-decision	
	Joint	Nuclear	Joint	Nuclear
<b>Control over finance</b>				
On purchase of your own needs	540	490	106	42
On investment (Savings, purchase shares etc.)	201	198	198	133
Purchasing of Assets for own (House, Car etc.)	148	133	121	156
Support to parents (by giving money or taking care)	441	342	91	118
Spending husband's income	224	239	255	171
<b>Freedom of movement</b>	<b>1554</b>	<b>1402</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>620</b>
Going and staying with parents or siblings	258	239	68	114
Going out with friend/s & colleague(s)	334	247	84	125
Permission to Go out alone	460	296	72	42
Permission to Go out with friend(s)	308	171	76	38
<b>Decision making power (Household decisions &amp; career)</b>	<b>1360</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>319</b>
Family tour/picnic/outing	182	122	175	129
Children education & health (School, Tutorials)	365	395	167	84
Extra coaching or other Activities for children	228	315	175	95
Family type you are living (Joint/Nuclear)	163	141	221	209
Big household purchases (TV, Fridge, Mobile etc.)	106	137	217	121
Personal health (visit to Doctor, Hospital etc.)	315	353	141	61
Holding any spiritual, social functions in house	308	304	7	38
Continue with higher education	426	312	117	121
Nature & place of job	357	289	95	91
<b>Total</b>	<b>2450</b>	<b>2368</b>	<b>1315</b>	<b>949</b>

Significance of difference in the proportion of working women taking self-decision or Joint-decision on the stated indicators of Autonomy was tested using Two-sample Z-test of equal proportions. Null hypothesis (Ho) and Alternate hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) were stated as follows.

Ho: The difference in proportion on self-decision (or Joint-decision) making count of working women is insignificant for Joint and Nuclear families on the stated indicators of autonomy

H<sub>1</sub>: The difference in proportion on self-decision (or Joint-decision) making count of working women is insignificant for Joint and Nuclear families on the stated indicators of autonomy

Ho: P<sub>1</sub>=P<sub>2</sub> vs H<sub>1</sub>: P<sub>1</sub>≠P<sub>2</sub>

$$Z\text{-Statistics: } Z = \frac{P_1 - P_2}{pq \sqrt{\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}}}, p = \frac{n_1 P_1 + n_2 P_2}{n_1 + n_2}, q = 1 - p$$

Critical value: 1.96 at 5% I.o.s.

Ho is rejected when p-value is less than 0.025 on either side

**Table 8: Z-Test for significance of difference in proportions on Self-decision**

Determinants of autonomy	Self-decision		Joint-decision	
	z-value	p-value	z-value	p-value
<b>Control over finance</b>				
On purchase of your own needs	0.383	0.351	4.78	0
On investment (Savings, purchase shares etc.)	-0.822	0.206	2.012	0.022
Purchasing of Assets for own (House, Car etc.)	0.231	0.409	-2.39	0.008
Support to parents (by giving money or taking care)	3.565	0	1.773	0.038
Spending husband's income	-1.972	0.024	1.784	0.037
<b>Freedom of movement</b>				
Going and staying with parents or siblings	-0.116	0.454	-3.015	0.001
Going out with friend/s & colleague(s)	3.394	0	0.676	0.25
Permission to Go out alone	7.099	0	8.734	0
Permission to Go out with friend(s)	6.572	0	8.123	0
<b>Decision making power (Household decisions &amp; career)</b>				
Family tour/picnic/outing	3.057	0.001	4.349	0
Children education & health (School, Tutorials)	-3.364	0	0.628	0.265
Extra coaching or other Activities for children	-6.062	0	-2.266	0.012
Family type you are living (Joint/Nuclear)	0.585	0.279	0.149	0.441
Big household purchases (TV, Fridge, Mobile etc.)	-2.887	0.002	2.187	0.014
Personal health (visit to Doctor, selecting Hospital etc.)	-3.574	0	0.308	0.379
Holding any spiritual, social functions in house	-1.199	0.015	-2.944	0.002
Continue with higher education	4.437	0	4.033	0
Nature & place of job	2.2	0.014	2.012	0.022

Proportion of women taking self-decision making (see Table-8) is significantly more and positive w.r.t. career, family tour picnic, freedom to go out alone as well as with friends & colleagues, and support to parents. This reflects the more autonomy in Joint family, which is a good sign for the working women and society. Whereas, negative & significant difference in proportion is seen on taking decisions w.r.t. 'Children education & coaching', 'Big

household purchase' and 'Personal health' as in these matters other family members play a significant role. On the other hand, insignificant difference is observed on self-decision making proportion on other matters.

In proportion of women taking Joint decision is significantly more on taking decision w.r.t. 'Purchase of own needs, Investment, going out alone as well as with friends, family tour & picnic, big household purchase and career. This reflects the more involvement of women in decision making in Joint families. Whereas, the proportion is significantly less (negative) w.r.t. 'Purchase of assets in own name', 'Going & staying with parents or siblings', 'Coaching to children' and 'holding functions in house'. This reflects more decision power in Nuclear families on these indicators.

Overall negative value of Z-statistic indicates the more decision power to women in Nuclear families as compare to Joint families.

## 6. Conclusions

On self-decision making, highest change of 73.64% is seen on 'Spending husband income' is seen in Joint families whereas, in Nuclear families it is 46.15% (max) on decision making w.r.t. 'Purchasing of Assets for own which reflects women's the control over finance. This shows that, in Joint families women claim more autonomy on husband income but in Nuclear families they get the autonomy to buy assets in own name. Autonomy is extended to women on 'Holding spiritual and social functions in house' though their freedom to go out is limited. Difference in proportion of women taking self-decision on freedom is significantly more in Joint-families w.r.t. their career, family tour picnic, freedom to go out alone as well as with friends & colleagues, and support to parents. Whereas, the proportion is significantly less (negative) w.r.t. 'Purchase of assets in own name', 'Going & staying with parents or siblings', 'Coaching to children' and 'holding functions in house.'

Hence, it can be concluded that, economic empowerment makes the women more concerned about their participation in decision making irrespective of the family type they live. It can also be seen as Joint families are ready to give women some space in the decision making process when they are working.

## 7. Future Scope

The present study included women in age-group 26-35 years and earning income between Rs.20000/- to Rs.30000/- per month in maximum proportion. At the same time only working women are included. So it would be interesting to study the autonomy level of women professionals and housewives from high income group families.

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