

The Involvement of Women in Household Decision-Making Process in Myanglung Municipality

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Abstract

In Nepal, traditional gender roles often place men in dominant positions within households, limiting women's participation in household decision-making processes. Understanding women's involvement and the factors influencing their role is crucial for promoting gender equity. This study aims to assess the extent of women's participation in household decision-making in Myanglung Municipality, identify key factors affecting their involvement, and examine the implications for family dynamics. Primary quantitative data were collected from households in Myanglung Municipality, Tehrathum. Data analysis focused on identifying the level of women's participation and the influence of variables such as age, caste, and education on decision-making power. Findings demonstrate that men predominantly control household decisions, especially those related to income. Women tend to participate more actively in decisions related to limited domains. Factors including age, caste, and educational attainment significantly affect the degree of women's involvement in decision-making processes. There exists a significant gender gap in household decision-making in Myanglung Municipality. Increasing women's participation requires addressing socio-cultural barriers and enhancing educational opportunities to foster a more equitable distribution of decision-making authority within households.

Keywords: women's participation, household decision-making, gender roles, socio-cultural factors, education, caste, family dynamics

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Introduction

In Nepal, women constitute more than 50.4% of the total population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Despite their significant demographic presence, women are predominantly engaged in domestic tasks alongside various social and economic activities. However, they face unequal access to resources and opportunities, which limits their full participation in societal development.

A household is defined as a group of individuals related by blood or adoption who share a common

kitchen and pool their income collectively (Keynes, 1935). Traditionally, women have been more involved in household management and activities related to family well-being than men (Devkota et al., 1998). In rural settings, households serve as fundamental units for both consumption and labor supply decisions (Whealock & Oughton, 1996).

Women contribute substantially to household income and work. Women's participation refers to their ability to engage equally with men at all levels and in all facets of household, public, and political



life, including decision-making and activism (Gender and Development Network, 2015). The head of a household is typically regarded as the person responsible for maintaining household activities and making key decisions. Usually, this role is assumed by the chief earner or the oldest family member (National Council of Applied Economic Research [NCEAH], 1976).

Decision-making involves selecting a course of action from among various alternatives. It is a reasoning process that can be rational or irrational and often depends on underlying assumptions (Paudel, 2012). Within households, decision-making processes incorporate negotiations among members, balancing work for income generation and self-consumption needs (Omari, 1995). Gender discrimination in household decision-making is pervasive in Nepal, influenced further by caste, class, culture, religion, and geographical location—particularly in rural areas (Acharya & Bennett, 1981). Decision-making extends across various spheres of human life, including household chores and public and private sector activities.

The degree of participation in household decision-making is not solely determined by gender but also by an individual's contribution to household income. Those who contribute more financially tend to have greater decision-making power, regardless of gender (Alam, 1998). However, most Nepalese families uphold a patriarchal culture that restricts women's freedoms and liberties from early childhood, with entrenched social and cultural practices negatively affecting women's roles and access to resources. Consequently, women remain underrepresented in state mechanisms and other decision-making bodies (RCHCO, 2012).

In a predominantly male-dominated society like Nepal, women have historically been regarded as having lower status and value. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed growing recognition of the importance of women's participation in economic and social development. Women's socio-economic advancement plays a crucial role in the overall progress of a nation.

Discriminatory social norms, including attitudes toward women's participation in decision-making, constitute fundamental barriers to their influence in public and political life. Politics and leadership roles are frequently seen as the domain of men, with pervasive negative perceptions preventing women from assuming leadership or decision-making positions. In developing countries, women generally bear a greater proportion of household work compared to men, often working long hours in unpaid labor, with daily work ranging from 4 to 18 hours (Bhattarai, 2010). Ownership of property is an important factor that can empower women to participate beyond the family, influencing community and national affairs.

Generally, major household decisions are made by males, who also tend to contribute more to household income, reinforcing a male-dominated social structure. Various factors, including socio-cultural, economic, and educational elements, affect the decision-making power of women in different domains across the country.

Rationale of the Study

Women participate in various household activities, including agricultural, economic, social, cultural, political, health, and educational sectors. However, despite their broad engagement, women generally do not possess full decision-making power across all household-related matters. Factors such as age, caste, education, marital status, occupation, religion, family type, social and cultural values and norms, employment status, and family size directly influence household decision-making dynamics. Gender inequality plays a central role in limiting women's decision-making authority, as the prevailing patriarchal social structure restricts women from making independent decisions. This lack of decision-making power leaves many women deprived of fundamental rights and access to power, policy formulation, government posts, and other authoritative positions, often confining them to household responsibilities alone (Adhikari et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2024).

In Nepal, women typically depend on men, largely because they are denied the right to decision-making power. The status of women is a critical determinant affecting the socio-economic development of households, society, and the nation at large. Without women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes, the objectives of development initiatives remain incomplete (Mishra & Mishra, 2024). Most women allocate time to unpaid domestic work such as washing, cooking, cleaning, and childcare—activities that are socially regarded as obligatory duties without monetary valuation. This undervaluation extends to their minimal decision-making influence within households (Adhikari et al., 2024).

Given the limited focus of government programs and previous research on this issue, this study conducted in Myanglung Municipality, Tehrathum, aims to fill the gap by examining women's participation in household decision-making processes, contributing to women's empowerment (Mishra, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating policies that promote gender equity and empower women both within the home and in wider societal structures.

Research Objective

To examine the participation of women in household decision-making processes and analyze the influence of key socio-demographic factors on their involvement in different household activities.

Literature Review

A literature review critically analyzes existing published works on a specific topic. This chapter synthesizes diverse studies that examine the intricate dynamics of household decision-making processes, particularly focusing on women's participation. It explores national-level research and theoretical perspectives pertinent to understanding the socio-cultural and economic factors influencing women's roles in household decisions. While earlier studies provide a broad conceptual foundation, this research narrows down to a specific geographical and contextual focus,

aiming to elucidate the factors that affect women's decision-making roles in Myanglung Municipality, Nepal.

Theories serve as analytical tools to explain, predict, and expand understanding of social phenomena. The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws on classical and contemporary perspectives on gender and decision-making.

Marx (1867), highlighted the economic oppression of women under capitalism, where the labor of women and children was exploited to maximize capitalist profits. He argued that by relegating women to unpaid domestic labor, capitalism perpetuated their economic dependence on men and their exclusion from wage labor, a condition communism sought to redress.

The functionalist perspective, articulated by Talcott Parsons and dominant in mid-20th-century sociology, views gender inequality as a mechanism for social stability through a division of labor. According to this theory, men are providers while women manage the home, roles seen as complementary and efficient for societal functioning (Boundless, 2016). However, critics argue that this perspective legitimizes discriminatory gender roles rather than challenging them.

Feminist theory offers a counterpoint by asserting that gendered power imbalances are institutionalized through patriarchy and sexism, perpetuating women's oppression (Park, 1972). Feminism advocates for women's empowerment through consciousness-raising and restructuring social relations to achieve equitable participation in decision-making and leadership.

Empirical studies in Nepal and similar contexts reveal persistent gender disparities in household decision-making despite women's substantial involvement in domestic and productive activities. Women participate extensively in agricultural tasks and household management but

often lack proportionate control over resources and decision-making authority.

[Devkota \(2009\)](#) found that women generally have access to land resources but control over benefits remains with men in male-dominated Nepali society. Income generated from surplus agricultural production is typically controlled by male household heads, reflecting traditional gender norms legitimized by social customs.

Economic participation is positively correlated with decision-making power. [Acharya and Bennett \(1981\)](#), posited that women with higher economic involvement experience greater autonomy in decisions, influenced further by factors such as the size of young children, which affects women's public and economic engagement.

Time-use studies indicate that women work longer hours than men, averaging nine hours daily in agricultural and domestic tasks, compared to men's six hours. Despite this, women often lack access to financial resources, education, and social networks necessary for political participation or leadership roles. Gender inequalities in education and training further constrain women's confidence and opportunities to engage in decision-making ([Gender and Development Network, 2015](#)).

Supporting women's empowerment requires long-term strategies encompassing skill development, confidence-building, and network facilitation. Such efforts enhance their effectiveness in leadership and decision-making spheres once access is gained.

[Acharya et al. \(2010\)](#), emphasizes that women's decision-making power relates to economic status, entrepreneurial activities, marriage freedom, and family support systems. Education emerges as a critical enabler for enhancing women's awareness of rights and capacities to participate in decisions beyond the household.

Implications of the Review for the Study

This literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic and

cultural dimensions shaping women's participation in household decision-making in Nepal. It highlights critical gaps and contextual factors, such as patriarchal norms, economic dependency, and educational barriers, that limit women's agency. Recognizing these factors informs the formulation of research objectives focused on exploring women's roles within household decision-making processes specifically in Myanglung Municipality. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of empirical investigation into localized experiences that may differ from national trends, aiding the development of tailored interventions for enhancing women's empowerment and decision-making participation.

Methodology

Methodology refers to the systematic approach employed to generate new knowledge by defining the overall research strategy and the specific procedures used to collect and analyze data. This section outlines the research design, study area selection, population, sampling methods, data collection tools, and techniques for data processing and analysis employed in this study.

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research method with a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for gathering numerical data to describe the extent and nature of women's participation in household decision-making processes. According to [Kothari \(2004\)](#), descriptive research design enables the researcher to observe and measure variables systematically in their natural settings. The survey design was selected to efficiently address the research objectives through direct data collection from households in Myanglung Municipality.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Myanglung Municipality, the administrative headquarters of Tehrathum District, within Koshi Province, Nepal. Myanglung spans an area of 100.21 square kilometers, comprising a diverse population of

approximately 18,750 individuals, including 9,114 males and 9,636 females residing in 4,872 households (CBS, 2078). The municipality is home to various ethnic and caste groups including Limbu, Chhetri, Bahun, Tamang, Kami, Newar, Majhi, Magar, and Gurung communities. This setting provides a representative socio-cultural context for examining household decision-making patterns.

Population

The population of interest for this study includes all 4,872 households within Myanglung Municipality. A population is defined as a complete set of elements sharing common characteristics pertinent to the research topic (Kothari, 2004). The study focuses on these households as units of analysis to understand women's participation in domestic decision-making processes.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

Sampling involves selecting a subset of units from the population that accurately represents the whole, allowing for feasible and reliable data collection. This study uses a non-probability purposive sampling technique, which enables the selection of households based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Chaudhary et al., 2021; Karki, 2024). Purposive sampling is appropriate here due to the focus on particular attributes related to household decision-making roles.

From the total population of 4,872 households, 50 households were selected as a representative sample. This sample size was chosen to facilitate a detailed and manageable inquiry into women's participation while maintaining the feasibility of data collection and analysis.

Data Collection Tools

Primary data were collected directly from respondents through structured questionnaires. Questionnaires are widely recognized as effective tools for obtaining quantitative data related to

demographic characteristics, participation levels, and socio-economic factors influencing decision-making (Joshi, 2024). The questionnaire included closed-ended questions designed to capture measurable information on women's roles in various household activities.

Secondary data were also utilized to complement and contextualize primary findings. These were obtained from government publications, census reports, academic journals, and credible online sources relevant to gender and household decision-making in Nepal (Joshi, 2024).

Data Collection Procedure

Field data collection involved face-to-face administration of questionnaires with the respondents from the selected households in Myanglung Municipality. Observational notes supplemented the primary data to provide contextual understanding. Data collection was carried out systematically to ensure consistency and reliability.

Data Processing and Analysis

Collected data were organized and entered into tabular forms for systematic analysis. Quantitative analysis involved the use of basic statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, and descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and their participation in decision-making processes. The analysis was executed to meet the research objectives regarding identifying women's participation and assessing the influence of socio-demographic factors such as age, caste, and education on household decision-making.

Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics examined include age, ethnic background, and educational attainment of respondents drawn from the 50 sampled households. These variables provide essential context for interpreting patterns of women's participation in the household decision-making process.

The age is most important factor in demographic study and it makes difference in

decision-making roles, working hours, type of work, social relation and responsibilities as well. Age determines the social status of people. Age has great influence in terms of decision-making

Table 1*Age Composition of the Respondents*

Age group	Population	Male	Female	Female %	Male %	Respondents
Below 30	9799	4159	5640	57.55	42.44	17
30-60	6683	3787	2896	43.33	56.67	31
60-Above	2268	1168	1100	48.50	51.50	4
Total	18750	9114	9636			50

Note. Myanglung Municipality

This table express the age composition pf the answerers/respondents. Among the total female respondents 57.55% in below 30 years' age of group 17 respondents, as well as 43.33% in 30to 60 age group respondents 31& above 60 years' age group female respondents 48.50% also 4 respondents.

Table 2*Age Composition of the Respondents by Caste*

Caste	Population	Population %	Respondents
Limbu	6093	32.5	15
Chetri	3656	19.49	12
Bahun	2569	13.70	8
Tamang	1556	8.29	3
Newar	1443	7.69	3
Kami	1031	5.49	2
Gurung	544	2.90	2
Sarki	375	2.0	2
Others	1483	7.90	3
Total	18750	100	50

Note. Myanglung municipality record 2023

This table express the caste distribution of respondents. Among the total respondents Limbu 15, Chetri 12, Bahun 8, Tamang 3, Newar 3, Kami 2, Gurung 2, Sarki 2, Others 3.

Educational status

Education is the key indicator for reforming society and upgrading its economic and social

and taking part in social activities. Only 15 above years of age's women are taken as a sample. The age group has been divided as below 30/30-60 and above 60 years.

Caste/Ethnic Composition

Nepal is a multi-ethnic country with diverse castes and cultures. In my municipality, women's decision-making power is relatively higher among Brahmin, Chhetri, and Limbu communities.

status. Education enhances the ability and capability of human being to judge for right and wrong. It also plays the vital role in decision-making process in household as well as in the society. Those voices are respected who are educated and having higher educational background.

Table 3*Educational Status of the Respondents*

Education	Total Population	Total %	Female Population	Female %	Respondents
Illiterate	3315	17.68	1368	14.19	7
Below SLC	10018	53.42	5870	60.91	30
Above SLC	1137	6.06	1753	18.91	9
Others	4280	22.82	645	6.69	4
Total	18750	100	9636	100	50

Note. CBS office DKT 2074

The educational status is divided into 3 categories, which are Illiterate, below SLC and higher education. Those who cannot read and write they are kept in illiterate. In the same way below SLC represents the primary to the S.L.C. level. And Above SLC represents are all who have attained all the levels above SLC up to Graduation level education. Table 5 shows that educational status of the respondents. Out of the 50 respondents, 14.19 percent are illiterate. It was found that 60.91 percent were educate in below SLC level. Only 18.91 percentages have attained higher education. From this table, I found that educational status of respondent is good. This table shows that higher proportions of respondent are above S.L.C education achieved. This research will applicable to find out the actual condition of participation of women in household level decision-making process. And too useful for those individuals and institutions, which are interested to know the household level decision-making process. It will also be use full even for planners, policy makers, and other organizations to formulate and implement appropriate policies, plans and household level decision-making process.

Conclusion

This study investigated the participation of women in household decision-making processes in Myanglung Municipality, Tehrathum, focusing on the roles of socio-demographic factors. The findings highlight several critical insights relating to women's status, decision-making power, and the influence of cultural and economic contexts in the study area.

The educational status of respondents in Myanglung municipality is notably low, with only a small percentage attaining higher education. This limited educational attainment reflects broader challenges faced by women in the area and contributes significantly to their constrained participation in household decisions. Education is widely recognized as a key factor empowering women by enhancing their knowledge, confidence, and capacity to engage in decision-making at various levels. The generally larger family sizes observed in the study area, exceeding the national average, may also influence household dynamics by increasing the complexity of familial responsibilities and decision hierarchies.

Agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood for most respondents, indicating a predominantly rural socioeconomic context where traditional roles and norms persist strongly. While some households diversify their economic activities through business or service sectors, agriculture's centrality shapes patterns of resource control and labor division. In this regard, the study reveals that women participate actively in agricultural decisions such as selecting crops and seeds, demonstrating considerable agency within this domain. Conversely, men dominate decisions regarding the sale of surplus produce and management of household income, underscoring a gendered disparity in economic control and financial decision-making.

The findings also show that men hold dominant roles in critical household decisions, including those involving children's education,

medical treatment, and financial matters such as taking or giving loans. Women's participation in these areas is comparatively limited, reflecting entrenched patriarchal norms that assign decision-making authority predominantly to male household members. The male dominance in decision-making spans all age groups and is consistent across most activities, signaling the persistence of traditional gender roles within family structures.

Interestingly, the study identifies variations in women's decision-making power among different ethnic groups and occupational contexts. Women from Limbu, Gurung, and Newar communities exhibit relatively higher access to household decision-making, suggesting that cultural backgrounds and community norms influence women's agency. Likewise, households reliant primarily on agriculture tend to provide women with greater involvement in decisions, possibly due to the central role women play in farming activities. These nuances underscore the importance of contextual factors in shaping gender relations and decision-making patterns.

Overall, the study's use of purposive non-probability sampling with 50 female respondents from Myanglung Municipality provides valuable, if localized, insights into the dynamics of household decision-making. While men continue to dominate most decisions, women exercise considerable influence in specific sectors such as agricultural management and cultural ceremonies. This uneven distribution of power highlights the complexity of gender relations in rural Nepal and the need for targeted interventions to address structural inequalities.

To enhance women's participation and empowerment in household decision-making, strategies must prioritize improving educational opportunities, fostering economic independence, and challenging discriminatory socio-cultural norms. Policy efforts and community programs that raise awareness about gender equity, promote skills development for women, and encourage inclusive decision-making can contribute to narrowing the gender gap observed in this study. Additionally,

recognizing the diversity in ethnic and occupational contexts can help tailor interventions that respect local traditions while advancing women's rights.

In conclusion, while progress towards greater gender equity in household decision-making in Myanglung Municipality remains limited, this research underscores important entry points for promoting women's empowerment. By addressing educational deficits, economic constraints, and patriarchal barriers, social development initiatives can support women in obtaining a more equitable voice within their households, thereby contributing to improved socio-economic outcomes for families and communities as a whole.

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