



Research Article

Assessment of Women's Mobility in Public Space on Their Decision-Making Roles in the Community among the Njemps in Baringo County – Kenya

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Abstract

Empowering women is an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. There is no doubt that empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families, communities and the nation. A critical aspect of gender equality is the equal participation of women and men in decision-making about societal priorities and development directions. Despite recent developments with respect to gender issues acknowledging that empowerment of women will improve their status generally and enable them to actively and effectively participate in key decision making processes at all levels of human development, women are frequently neglected in economic, trade and development policies and planning because of socio-historical patterns in regard to gender-based inequalities and division of household roles. This is in spite of numerous national and international efforts to empower them economically, socio-culturally, legally, politically and psychologically. Notwithstanding women's contribution to the fabric of the household, women are commonly underestimated and ignored in community development strategies and key decision making processes. A lack of available gender-disaggregated data on community decision-making roles means that women's roles and contribution to decision making at the community level, in particular among the Njemps community is poorly understood. This study, therefore, sought to bridge this gap by examining the influence of women's mobility in public space on their decision making roles among the Njemps in Baringo County – Kenya.

Keywords: Mobility; Public space; Decision-making roles; Women; Njemps; Community.

Introduction

Women's mobility is important for two main reasons [1]. The first is that it helps to create a more gender equitable cultural norm by normalizing women's public mobility and access to public institutions. It is by no means the case that the social restrictions on women's public mobility have been removed, but there is a clear change in that women and girls have a wider menu of options and more room for manoeuvre and multiple interpretations of appropriate female behaviour than in the past [2]. Constraints on women's physical mobility in many parts of the world restrict their ability to make independent decisions.

Women in countries such as India, Egypt, and Bangladesh are governed by social norms that restrict their physical mobility, referred to in the literature as female seclusion. This seclusion

involves the veiling of head and face in some instances, as well as restrictions on unaccompanied travel to such places as shops, pharmacies, or hospitals, and limits on direct contact with unrelated males [3-4]. Thus, even in instances where women wish to make decisions regarding household consumption, expenditures, or health care, they may need help and agreement from other family members, particularly the husband or mother-in-law, in actually conducting these transactions. The concept of autonomy is multidimensional, hence the factors included within the concept has also varied between authors.

For most of the work in South Asia, women's participation in household decision making, her mobility, and control over her financial resources have been taken as indicators of 'autonomy'. Studies have suggested that

greater gender equality may encourage women's autonomy and may facilitate the uptake of contraception because of increased female participation in decision making [5]. Much of the relevant demographic literature that has addressed the links between gender inequality and fertility regulation has focused on women's autonomy. In Bangladesh, the practice of *pardah* or seclusion is prevalent in various degrees depending on the socio-economic and educational levels of the men and women in the family. While some families do practice absolute seclusion, barring women from travelling alone for all kinds of activities; other families have redefined their sense of *pardah*, allowing women to travel outside when accompanied by an adult or child. The establishment of garment industries in Bangladesh has seen another generation of women who have joined the labour market and the norms of traditional village life have undergone major changes [6-7].

For women in garment work or any other form of formal labour the mobility has been found to be higher than their Additionally, with high male labour migration to various parts of Asia, Europe and the Middle East, another group of women have emerged as household heads. The 'left behind' women have the added pressure of performing various roles which were previously completely under the male domain, these women may no longer be required to be accompanied by a male adult and their mobility may be higher. Studies have found that women conditions have increased decision making compared to their peers, but the effect of mobility has not been adequately. Earlier studies established that the links between her mobility and decision making has been found to be positive. Women who had higher decision making ability and higher mobility were more likely to use modern contraception [8].

Research methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Descriptive research is undertaken with the aim of describing characteristics of variables in a situation. It describes "what is" and is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing [9-13].

A survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population [8]. According to [4] descriptive studies are designed to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the status of phenomena and whenever possible to draw valid general conclusions from the facts discovered [2]. Postulates that descriptive survey is the most appropriate design in behavioural science as it seeks to find out factors associated with certain occurrences, outcomes and conditions of behaviour. The target population for the study constituted all women from the 4,219 households in 6 administrative Locations of Baringo District as per the 2009 population census, inhabited by the Njemps.

Pilot testing

The questionnaire was pilot-tested on sample of 20 household female respondents drawn from 2 of the Locations. The households that participated in the pilot study were not included in the actual sample for study. The respondents were encouraged to make comments and suggestions concerning the instructions, clarity of questions asked and their relevance [8-10]. The results from the piloting were used in validating the instruments by revising the items appropriately.

Validity

According to [12] validity is the extent to which data collection method accurately measure what they are intended to measure. It indicates the degree to which an instrument measures the construct under investigation [10]. When applying this to data collected through a questionnaire it means that the data collected is the data that actually should be collected. [12] stresses that the questions have to be understood in the way that was the purpose from the researcher, it has to be answered in the way that was thought from the researcher and the answer must be interpreted by the researcher in the way intended by the respondent. Therefore, in constructing the instrument items, simple English language that the respondents easily understood was used.

Effort was made to ensure that the items were clear and precise without any ambiguity, ensuring that the items addressed the objectives of the study. The instruments were given to the

supervisor and other research experts at the University of Nairobi for expert judgment and review of content and face validity.

Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability is the level of internal consistency or stability over time [4]. The reliability of the questionnaire items was determined using the Cronbach alpha coefficient, using data from pilot testing. Cronbach alpha provided a good measure of reliability because holding other factors constant the more similar the test content and conditions of administration are, the greater the internal consistency reliability [8]. In [12] a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.70$ and above is recommended.

Results and discussions

The objective of this research sought to establish the extent to which women's mobility in public space influences their decision-making roles in the community. Mobility in public space was assessed in terms of women's participation in extra-familial groups and social networks, freedom and safety to circulate in public spaces; ability to use transport e.g. bike, bus or taxi. Greater mobility of women in public space was hypothesized to positively correlate with women's decision-making roles. This section presents and discusses the findings on women's mobility with respect to the mentioned indicators and analyzes its relationship with their decision-making roles.

Women Participation in Extra-Familial Groups and Social Networks

The respondents were asked to indicate the number of women's groups they belonged to

other than the micro-finance groups as discussed under access to credit. Their responses are shown in Table 1. The highest percentage of women interviewed (41%) had membership in two groups, 35% were members in one group, 15% were members of three groups, 3% belonged to more than three groups while 7% did not have membership in any group. This implied that majority of the women (93%) subscribed membership to at least a group, thus giving them opportunities to move and socialize with other women within the groups and even beyond. Such social spaces may give women opportunities learn from each other through information sharing, which to some extent empowers women to take part in decision-making.

Table 1. Women number of extra-familial groups

No. of groups	Frequency	Percentage
One	108	34.7
Two	126	40.5
Three	45	14.5
More than three	9	2.9
None	23	7.4
Total	311	100.0

Freedom and Safety to Circulate in Public Spaces

The respondents were asked to indicate the number of times they went out in a week for various stated reasons. Their responses were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of times women went attended various activities

Reason for circulating	Frequency of Attendance, %					Total %
	Never	1-2	3-4	5-6	Daily	
i. Attending women's group meetings	7.4	80.4	6.1	-	6.1	100
ii. Going to the market	-	62.7	18.6	-	18.6	100
iii. Attending church service	-	78.8	3.5	3.5	14.0	100
iv. Visiting relatives	11.0	75.6	17.4	3.5	-	100
v. Visiting friends	3.5	74.3	18.6	3.5	-	100

The percentages in the table reveal that majority of the women had at least a day within a week on which they went out to attend to/undertake the listed activities. These percentages ranged from 80% (highest) for the women who attended women's group meetings, 79% had such a time to attend church service, 76% and 74% visited relatives and friends respectively, to 63% (lowest) for those who had at least a day to go to the market. This frequency, together with those who have more than 2 days within a week to make such movements indicate that there is significant mobility of women that could positively influence their decision-making roles as a result of their interactions within such spaces.

When asked to indicate how often they sought permission to go out for the activities, their responses were as shown in Table 3. The percentages in the table indicate that significantly more than half of the respondents either never sought permission or at most rarely sought permission to attend various functions or visit various places. For instance, 64% of the women never sought permission to attend church services, 45% in each case never sought permission for either attending women's group meetings or visiting friends, and 38% and 32% respectively went to the market and visited friends without first seeking permission. On the other hand a significant 43% of the women often sought permission to attend women's group meetings, 36% to go to the market, 32% for visiting relatives and 28% for attending church services.

Generally, these findings may be interpreted to mean that although a significant percentage of the women still seek permission before moving, the highest percentage do not, which is an indicator of empowerment to be in a position to make decisions on their own.

Ability to Move Unaccompanied

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they were usually allowed to go to the various places on their own. The responses were as shown in Table 4. The findings indicate that majority of the women were allowed to go to all the places on their own without being accompanied. All the women were allowed to go to local markets to buy things unaccompanied, 91% in each case were allowed to go outside the house and to local health centers/doctor unaccompanied while 85% and 80% respectively were able to visit homes of relatives or friends in the neighborhoods and move within the neighborhoods for recreation.

Ability to use Transport

The respondents were asked to indicate how often they used various forms of transport. Response categories varied from "Never" to "Always". The respondents' responses were then analyzed descriptively using percentages while the scores were used for further correlation analysis. The findings were as shown in Table 5.

Table 3. Freedom to circulate in public spaces

Reason for Circulating	Frequency of Permission, %			Total %
	Never	Rarely	Often	
i. Attending women's group meetings	45.0	11.9	43.1	100
ii. Going to the market	37.6	26.4	36.0	100
iii. Attending church service	63.7	8.7	27.7	100
iv. Visiting relatives	31.8	36.0	32.2	100
v. Visiting friends	45.3	39.2	15.4	100

Table 4. Ability to move unaccompanied

Place	Response, %		Total %
	Yes	No	
i. Just outside your house or compound	90.7	9.3	100
ii. Local market to buy things	100	-	100
iii. Local health center or doctor	90.7	9.3	100
iv. In the neighborhood for recreation	80.4	19.6	100
v. Home of relatives or friends in the neighborhood	84.9	15.1	100

The findings revealed that the most common means of transport utilized by the women was the bicycle for which 43% of the women always used, followed by the motorcycle at 19%. The least common mode of transport was a personal car which only 9% of the respondents used at least sometimes. The high percentages of women using either the bicycle or the motorcycle at least sometimes (72% and 81% respectively) is due to the remoteness of the area with mostly earthen roads, making the bicycle and the motorcycle the most convenient means of transport. To determine the influence of women's mobility in public space on their decision-making roles, an index for women's mobility in public space was adopted. The index constituted questionnaire items number 10-13, where the following

scoring strategy was adopted for the responses obtained: Never=0; Rarely=1; Sometimes=2; Often/ always=3 and Daily=4. However, this scoring strategy was reversed for question 10 where the scores were: Never=3, Rarely=2; Sometimes=1 and Often=0. The total scores were used to compute percentage scores and used to conduct the analysis to determine the relationship between women's mobility in public space on their decision-making roles. The correlations were as shown in Table 6. The findings indicated that significant positive relationships existed between women's mobility in public space and reproductive decision-making ($r=0.23$), socio-cultural decision-making ($r=0.24$) and economic decision-making ($r=0.11$).

Table 5. Ability to use transport

	Never, %	Rarely, %	Sometimes, %	Always, %	Total, %
i. Personal car	86.2%	4.5%	4.5%	4.8%	100%
ii. Matatu	18.6%	43.1%	32.5%	5.8%	100%
iii. Taxi	75.6%	-	24.4%	-	100%
iv. Bicycle (<i>Boda boda</i>)	19.0%	9.3%	28.3%	43.4%	100%
v. Motorcycle	10.3%	5.8%	65.0%	19.0%	100%

Table 6: Correlation between women mobility in public space on their decision-making roles

		MPS	RDM	SCDM	EDM
RDM	Pearson's (r)	0.226**	1		
	P-Value	0.000			
SCDM	Pearson's (r)	0.240**	0.420**	1	
	P-Value	0.000	0.000		
EDM	Pearson's (r)	0.105**	0.613**	0.860**	1
	P-Value	0.000	0.000	0.000	

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

Legend: MPS =Mobility in Public Space; RDM=- Reproductive decision-making;

SCDM= Socio-Cultural decision-making; EDM=Economic decision-making

Conclusion

A significant relationship exists between women's mobility in public space and their decision-making roles. When women have the freedom to move interact with each other and the public, they get opportunities to learn from each other through cross-cultural and cross-boundary platforms. Such spaces empower women to the extent that they become more knowledgeable about the roles they need to play both at the family level and in the larger society, albeit getting influenced by those who already have such capacities.

Conflict of interest

Authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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