

# Indicators of Women's Empowerment in India

*Of the three direct measures of autonomy, involvement in decision-making, freedom of movement and access to money, women, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, have the least autonomy in terms of freedom of movement, which turns out to be an important indicator of empowerment.*

By T.K. Roy and S. Niranjana\*

Women's empowerment, or autonomy, is a multifaceted concept. In a patriarchal society, as exists in large parts of India, men are placed in a more advantageous position than women. The family lineage and living arrangements are centred on men, and inheritance and succession practices tend to neglect women as well. The state of male supremacy is reflected in the child rearing and caring practices. The celebrations for the birth of a male child, and the differential treatment meted out to boys bears ample evidence of this. Access to nutrition, child care and education all favour boys over girls. From a very early age, a girl is

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\* T.K. Roy, Director and Senior Professor, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India, and S. Niranjana, Lecturer, Department of Development Studies, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, e-mail: nsaggurti@vsnl.net.

socialized to give priority to the needs of the male members in the family. The cumulative effect of these practices is a tilt in the power relations in favour of males. Women's empowerment is essentially an effort to rectify this imbalance and attain gender equity.

Based on a few macrolevel indicators like expectation of life at birth, education and income, the UNDP (2000) has developed a gender-related development index. According to this index, the gender inequity in 1998 is substantially high in India and ranks a poor 108<sup>th</sup> out of the 143 countries for which the index value is available. In India, a gender gap in literacy still persists, though it has narrowed over the years. For example, at the dawn of independence, according to the 1951 census, only nine per cent of females were literate, compared to 27 per cent of males. Female literacy improved faster than males and after 50 years, the level of literacy for females and males is 54 and 75 per cent, respectively. The differentials are particularly wide in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

A similar pattern can be observed in the case of increased life expectancy. Unlike most countries, the longevity of males is higher than that of females in India and has been so for a long time. In recent years, owing to improvements in the female life expectancy, female life expectancy has exceeded male life expectancy marginally. Notwithstanding, female child mortality continues to be much higher compared to males, particularly in the north of the country.

Marriage practices also have an immense influence on women's position in family. In fact, a difference in marriage customs between north and south India has been identified as a factor responsible for the differential level of women's status (Dyson and Moore, 1983). In southern India marriages often occur between relatives. In such consanguineous marriages, brides do not go into a completely unknown family. Marriages in the south are generally endogamous, and brides maintain their link with the natal family. In contrast, marriages in the north are exogamous and a bride goes into a completely unknown family, causing the link with her natal family to weaken.

There are studies which have highlighted the role of gender in understanding demographic diversity within the country. They suggest that women's status is an important variable responsible for the lower level of fertility in the south, compared to the north. Bardhan (1974) suggested that widespread rice cultivation in the south, which is female labour intensive, contributes positively towards the economic value of a woman and is possibly a contributing factor for lower fertility in the south than in the north of India. Dyson and Moore (1983) and later Malhotra, Vanneman and Kishore (1995) further investigated the north-south dichotomy in the demographic transition and emphasized the role of gender

equality in this context. It was confirmed that patriarchy and development play a strong role in defining regional variations in fertility levels in India. Aspects of patriarchy are both overlapping and multidimensional in their relationship to fertility: gender discrimination and marriage systems overlap considerably, while women's economic value is relatively independent of the other two dimensions.

Studies on women's empowerment as such, are rare. There is a lack of knowledge regarding different dimensions of women's autonomy and specific strategies to enhance it. Laws and institutional rules can support the endeavour of women's empowerment, but considering the complex cultural beliefs and practices that lie at the root of the imbalance, the effectiveness of such isolated efforts remains doubtful.

In the absence of appropriate measures of empowerment, commonly found measures like education and employment are used as surrogates. While those proxy measures are important and are ideally associated with empowerment, they may not capture all aspects of the multidimensional concept of empowerment (Joshi, 1999).

At the family/household level, gender inequity manifests itself in a weaker role for women in decision-making, lesser control over resources and restrictions in physical movement. According to Jejeebhoy (1998) "... while women's autonomy is indeed multidimensional, at least three dimensions – decision-making, mobility and access to economic resources – are closely related in all settings, irrespective of region or religion".

The recently conducted national family health survey, collected information on a variety of aspects related to the status of women and is a reliable resource to understanding different dimensions of women's autonomy in India. Using the above data, the present paper attempts to examine the following:

- Variation in the level of female autonomy in different sociocultural settings such as religion, caste, economic status and family type.
- Role of the indirect (proxy) indicators such as education, work participation, age and educational difference between spouses in understanding women's empowerment.
- Extent to which indirect indicators and direct indicators like decision-making, freedom of movement and access to money help facilitate women in gaining control over the circumstances of their lives (like self-esteem, favourable attitude towards girls' education and family planning practices).

### **Data and methodology**

The NFHS survey undertaken in 1998-1999 covered a representative sample of more than 90,000 eligible women aged 15-49 from 26 states that existed at that time. For the present study, two states were chosen; Uttar Pradesh (including the present Uttaranchal) from the north and Tamil Nadu from the south of India. Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu lie at two extremes of the demographic, social and cultural dimensions of India. The findings revealed that the total fertility rate in Uttar Pradesh was 3.99, which is much higher than 2.19 in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, the mortality rate was much lower in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh. For example, the infant mortality rate was 87 per 1,000 live births in Uttar Pradesh compared to 48 in Tamil Nadu. Female literacy was much higher in Tamil Nadu (59 per cent) than in Uttar Pradesh (43 per cent) (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2000). Both states are typically patriarchal and patrilocal and the northern region is well known for inequalitarian gender relations (Jejeebhoy, 1998). In order to understand the suitable indicators of women's empowerment and their influence, this study examines the indicators in two different sociocultural settings. This attempt will also hopefully facilitate an understanding of the north-south divide in women's equality. In Uttar Pradesh, the survey covered a total of 8,682 households and 9,292 eligible women. The analysis in this study is based on 8,012 currently married women who are the usual residents of the households. In Tamil Nadu, the survey covered a sample of 5,281 households, 4,676 eligible women, but the present analysis is only based on 4,028 currently married women who are permanent residents.

The variables related to women's empowerment have been categorized into three groups. The first category is referred to as indirect indicators of empowerment and includes education, occupation, age difference education difference between spouses. These indicate the characteristics that have relevance in influencing a woman's access to and control over resources. The next group is direct indicators of empowerment, and consists of indicators such as involvement in decision-making, freedom of movement and access to money. These indicators tend to provide evidence of empowerment (see Kishor, 1998 for a comprehensive discussion of the indicators). However, empowerment is a multidimensional concept, which purports to measure a woman's ability to control resources, her ability to choose and control different outcomes, and above all enhance her self-esteem. Our third set of indicators relates to a few additional dimensions of empowerment that the survey captures, and was referred to as evidence of empowerment. This category is comprised of three indicators, namely, extent of self-esteem, favourable attitude towards girls' education and practice of family planning.

In the survey, each woman was asked six questions to assess her attitude towards wife beating. The questions relate to whether, according to the respondent, a husband is justified in beating his wife for each of the following reasons: if he suspects her of being unfaithful, if her natal family does not pay the promised dowry; if she shows disrespect towards her in-laws; if she goes out without telling him; if she neglects the house or children; or if she does not cook food properly. A woman's self-esteem is considered high if she does not agree with any of these reasons as justification for a husband to beat his wife, otherwise her self-esteem is considered low.

A question was asked in the survey to each woman about her attitude towards girls'/boys' education. The specific question about girls' education asked was: "In your opinion, how much education should be given to girls these days". Based on the responses, a variable was computed to determine whether a woman has a favourable attitude towards girls' education. If according to a woman, the extent of education to be given to a girl is greater than or equal to that of a boy, she is regarded as having a favourable attitude, otherwise she is not seen as having a favourable attitude.

In addition to all those indicators of empowerment, the authors have considered five background characteristics of women to understand the variation in the autonomy in different sociocultural settings such as caste, religion, place of residence, standard of living and the type of family structure.

## **Results**

In the following section, the analysis on the relationship between the indirect and direct measures of autonomy is presented. An attempt is also made to examine how those indicators, in turn, are associated with the characteristics which provide evidence of empowerment.

### **Indirect vis-à-vis direct measures of autonomy**

In the absence of direct data on women's autonomy, previous studies have relied on other measures – years of education, work-force participation, marital age and spousal age difference as proxies for autonomy. Table 1 presents the bivariate associations between the indirect measures or proxies and the direct measures of female autonomy. As expected, all the three indicators of autonomy suggest that, compared to Uttar Pradesh, women in Tamil Nadu have greater autonomy. A higher proportion of women in Tamil Nadu are involved in decision-making about their own health care, have greater freedom of movement and access to money than women in Uttar Pradesh.

**Table 1. Percentage of usual residents and currently married women involved in decision-making about their own health care, percentage with freedom of movement and percentage with access to money by indirect indicators of female autonomy**

Indirect indicators	Uttar Pradesh				Tamil Nadu			
	Percent -age involved in decisions about own health care	Percent -age with complete freedom of move-ment	Percent -age with control over economic resources <sup>s</sup>	Number of women	Percent -age involved in decisions about own health care	Percent -age with complete freedom of move-ment	Percent -age with control over economic resources <sup>s</sup>	Number of women
<b>Education</b>								
Illiterate	43.0	9.6	46.2	5,677	58.0	53.8	76.1	1,882
Literate up to Middle	46.0	8.7	58.7	930	60.8	51.2	79.2	932
Middle+	50.1	15.1	69.1	1,405	57.1	51.4	82.0	1,213
<b>Occupation</b>								
Not working	43.1	9.6	50.3	6,120	56.5	47.7	77.0	1,920
Working not for cash	49.0	12.2	51.8	1,058	63.8	57.0	78.1	406
Working for cash	49.9	14.4	61.6	833	59.3	56.7	80.4	1,699
<b>Age difference between spouses</b>								
Little ( 5 years)	43.9	10.2	50.3	5,117	60.7	53.5	79.4	1,821
Moderate (6-10 years)	45.7	11.2	54.9	2,092	56.5	52.3	79.2	1,605
Big (> 10 years)	45.4	9.7	52.1	722	56.2	49.5	74.3	598
<b>Education difference between spouses</b>								
No difference	45.3	11.4	48.8	2,682	56.8	55.3	79.4	968
Moderate (5 classes)	46.3	10.5	56.7	2,479	59.8	51.7	78.1	2,346
Big (more than 5 years)	42.5	9.6	50.1	2,820	55.9	50.8	78.9	708
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>8,012</b>	<b>58.4</b>	<b>52.5</b>	<b>78.6</b>	<b>4,028</b>

<sup>s</sup> access to money.

Particularly striking is the low level of freedom of movement in Uttar Pradesh. Only 11 per cent of the women in the state mentioned that they have complete freedom of movement – meaning they do not need permission to either go to the market or visit their friends or relatives.

The relationship between the indirect and direct measures of autonomy differs in the two states. The two indirect indicators, education and occupation of women show a stronger association with the three direct indicators of autonomy in Uttar Pradesh than in Tamil Nadu. In fact, in Tamil Nadu the associations are found to be insignificant. In Uttar Pradesh, as the level of education of women

improves, their autonomy also increases. A much higher proportion of women who have completed at least a middle level of education are involved in decision-making, have freedom of movement and also have access to money, as compare with women who are illiterate. In Tamil Nadu, where the patriarchy is relatively weak compared to Uttar Pradesh, education, the most commonly used proxy indicator of autonomy, fails to show a clear association with the direct measure of autonomy. Contrary to this, Jejeebhoy found that in a setting where patriarchy is strong other traditional factors can counteract and make the empowering effect of education less significant, than in a setting where patriarchy is weak (Jejeebhoy, 1998). However, it is possible that in a setting where the level of female literacy is generally low, the literate women, particularly those who are educated at least up to a middle level are a select group. Other sources of empowerment such as family background, exposure to the outside world etc. are likely to be high and add to the creation of a positive empowering environment.

Work participation also tends to have beneficial effects in improving women's autonomy. A study by Sharma (1983) states that the women's status in the family is related to whether she is engaged in a gainful economic activity or not. Improved women's autonomy is noticeable among those who work outside for cash and is evident among women in Uttar Pradesh. The other two indirect indicators, age and educational difference between spouses, show no definite relationship with the three direct indicators of autonomy.

Table 2 presents the relationship between the sociocultural setting of women and the direct measures of autonomy. In other words, it shows how female autonomy as indicated by involvement in decision-making, freedom of movement and control over resources varies according to characteristics like caste, religion, residence, standard of living and type of family. The proportions shown against each category of the characteristics have been adjusted to take into account the differences in the levels of the indirect indicators (education, occupation, age and educational difference between spouses). The differentials are found to be larger in Uttar Pradesh compared to those in Tamil Nadu.

The most noticeable difference in the level of sociocultural setting of women and the direct measures of autonomy occurs in the type of family characteristic. Interestingly, the presence of in-laws in a family lowers the level of autonomy of women. Women living in joint families with their in-laws have the lowest levels of autonomy. Specifically, in Uttar Pradesh, women staying in nuclear families have the highest level of autonomy in terms of all three indicators. Another factor that is important in this context is the place of residence. Women living in rural areas are found to have less autonomy than urban women.

**Table 2. Percentage of usual residents and currently married women involved (adjusted)<sup>s</sup> in decision-making about their own health care, percentage with freedom of movement and percentage with access to money by background characteristics**

Background characteristics	Uttar Pradesh			Tamil Nadu		
	Percentage involved in decisions about own health care	Percentage with complete freedom of movement	Percentage with control over economic resources	Percentage involved in decisions about own health care	Percentage with complete freedom of movement	Percentage with control over economic resources
<b>Caste</b>						
SC/ST	57.4	25.9	83.4	66.3	62.5	92.8
Others	62.8***	22.1**	85.2**	67.3	62.1	93.0
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindus	61.4	23.0	84.3	67.0	62.7	93.0
Non-Hindus	63.1	22.6	87.2***	67.9	58.1*	92.9
<b>Place of residence</b>						
Urban	65.6	27.9	89.3	70.1	66.1	93.8
Rural	60.6**	21.7**	83.4***	65.4**	60.0***	92.4*
<b>Standard of living</b>						
Low	62.2	22.9	80.3	65.7	61.9	91.5
Medium	62.0	21.9	85.2***	68.5	63.1	93.3***
High	59.8	26.1	89.4***	65.6	60.0	94.4***
<b>Type of family</b>						
Broken/Suppl. extended	62.5**	23.2***	85.7***	65.8	65.0***	92.7***
Nuclear	63.7***	28.0***	87.1***	67.1	63.6***	93.8***
Joint without in-laws	61.9**	24.4***	85.4***	69.3	58.3*	92.9***
Joint with in-laws	57.6	15.5	79.5	66.7	51.7	84.1

<sup>s</sup> Adjusted for usually used proxy indicators of female autonomy mentioned in table 1.

\*\*\* p<0.001    \*\* p<0.05    \* p<0.10

### Autonomy and evidence of empowerment

It is expected that the different dimensions of autonomy should facilitate and culminate in greater self-esteem and a positive attitude towards the girl child among women. If a woman agrees and admits that a husband is justified in beating his wife for any of the reasons asked in the survey, she is seen as not fully empowered. Table 3 provides information on such associations.

At the outset, it is apparent that a much higher proportion of women in Uttar Pradesh have high self-esteem than women in Tamil Nadu. But, women in Tamil Nadu have a more equitable attitude towards educating girl children and a higher propensity to use family planning methods, as compared to women in Uttar Pradesh. Thirty-eight per cent of the women in Uttar Pradesh subscribe to the view that a husband is not justified in beating his wife under any of the circumstances



asked in the survey. In Tamil Nadu, the percentage of such women is much lower (26 per cent). By and large, the different direct indicators of autonomy are positively related to the indicators of empowerment. Freedom of movement shows the strongest association with the empowerment indicators. In Tamil Nadu, 31 per cent of women with complete freedom of movement showed greater self-esteem, compared to only 21 per cent of women without freedom of movement.

**Table 3. Percentage of permanent, who are currently married and do not agree with justifications given for a husband beating his wife (self-esteem), percentage with no unwanted pregnancy and percentage using family planning (by direct indicators of female autonomy)**

Women status	Uttar Pradesh				Tamil Nadu			
	Percent -age with greater self- esteem	Percent -age favour girls' education	Percent -age using family plan- ning	Number of women	Percent -age with greater self- esteem	Percent -age favour girls' education	Percent -age using family plan- ning	Number of women
<b>Decision-making in health care</b>								
Respondent involved	39.1	55.6	33.1	3,528	31.5	57.6	54.2	2,343
Not involved	36.9	51.3	27.1	4,370	19.0	56.5	51.9	1,674
<b>Freedom of movement</b>								
Complete freedom	45.7	66.3	40.3	827	31.3	61.3	55.3	2,103
No complete freedom	37.0	51.7	28.5	7,065	20.7	52.6	51.0	1,914
<b>Control over resources</b>								
Yes	37.7	56.4	34.4	4,083	27.6	57.2	53.6	3,146
No	38.1	49.8	24.9	3,778	21.4	56.8	51.7	857
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>53.2</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>7,897</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>57.0</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>4,018</b>

It is surprising to find that women in Tamil Nadu tend to accept wife beating more than those in Uttar Pradesh. It may be mentioned in this context, that a greater proportion of women in Tamil Nadu have reported being beaten than in Uttar Pradesh. It may not be out of context to mention that the survey showed a much higher proportion of males in Tamil Nadu drink alcohol than those in Uttar Pradesh (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2001) and alcohol abuse have been found to be a factor leading to domestic violence.

The relationship of the indirect measures of autonomy and the sociocultural settings to the factors of evidence of empowerment was also examined in this study. The three indicators of evidence of empowerment were evaluated separately and the results are shown in tables 4 to 6. Three separate logistic regression models have been used for each of the indicators.

**Table 4. Adjusted proportion of currently married women (usual residents of the household) not agreeing with reasons given in the survey to justify the husband beating his wife (self-esteem) – Results from logistic regression analysis<sup>s</sup>**

Background characteristics	Uttar Pradesh			Tamil Nadu		
	Model-I	Model-II	Model-III	Model-I	Model-II	Model-III
<b>Decision-making in health care</b>						
Respondent not involved	41.6	42.5	43.1	30.1	27.0	35.0
Respondent involved	43.3	43.3	43.8	43.3***	40.0***	49.4***
<b>Freedom of movement</b>						
No complete freedom	41.4	42.2	42.7	32.6	29.2	37.3
Complete freedom	50.2***	48.5***	49.7***	42.4***	39.2***	48.8***
<b>Control over economic resources</b>						
No	42.9	45.7	46.2	35.1	32.8	41.6
Yes	41.8	40.3***	40.9***	38.3	34.7	43.7
<b>Education</b>						
Illiterate		38.4	39.9		30.9	41.7
Literate up to middle		43.7***	43.1		28.9	36.7**
Middle+		61.0***	58.0***		44.5***	50.9***
<b>Occupation</b>						
Not working		43.9	44.4		35.8	44.4
Working not for cash		38.5***	38.7***		35.7	44.9
Working for cash		41.0	42.4		32.2*	41.6
<b>Place of residence</b>						
Urban		50.2	49.9		38.3	46.1
Rural		41.0	41.8***		32.2***	41.7**
<b>Age difference between spouses</b>						
Little		42.9	43.5		36.1	45.4
Moderate		43.2	43.2		33.5	41.9*
Big		41.4	43.1		31.1*	40.3*
<b>Education difference between spouses</b>						
Little		41.3	42.4		34.3	43.2
Moderate (5 classes)		43.1	43.6		34.1	43.2
Big (more than 5 years)		44.2*	44.2		34.8	43.5
<b>Caste</b>						
SC/ST			43.8			40.9
Others			41.6			44.0
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindus			42.6			42.4
Non-Hindus			43.6			50.0**
<b>Standard of living</b>						
Low			41.5			41.3
Medium			42.2			40.7
High			50.2***			55.8***
<b>Type of family</b>						
Broken/Suppl. extended nuclear			43.6			43.5
Nuclear			41.7*			43.7
Joint without in-laws			44.8			42.6
Joint with in-laws			44.9			40.3

<sup>s</sup> controlled for age of the respondent

\*\*\* p<0.001    \*\* p<0.05    \* p<0.10

### **Attitude towards wife beating**

Direct indicators of autonomy, particularly whether a woman has complete freedom of movement, shows a significant association with her attitude towards wife beating in both states. For example, in Tamil Nadu, a relatively higher proportion of women with freedom of movement deplore wife beating, compared to those not having freedom of movement (table 4). Autonomy in decision-making also leads to higher self-esteem in Tamil Nadu, but not in Uttar Pradesh. Control over resources does not lead to a favourable disposition of women towards wife beating in Tamil Nadu. One surprising result is that in Uttar Pradesh a lower proportion of women with control over resources show high self-esteem compared to those with no control over resources. In this context, it may be mentioned that the proportion of women working for cash is much higher among those who say they have control over resources than those who claim to have no control over resources. The majority of women working for cash are agricultural labourers or unskilled or skilled manual workers. These women are found to have lower self-esteem, compared to women who are either home makers or working not for cash or are in professional jobs/service sector. The education level of women is found to be an important indicator showing a positive influence on empowerment. However, a moderate level of education does not help in strengthening self-esteem among women. In fact, in Tamil Nadu, a significantly lower proportion of women with a moderate level (literate but below middle) of education are found to have self-esteem compared to illiterates women. As a whole, the sociocultural differentials tend to narrow down when the direct and indirect measures of autonomy are significant.

### **Attitude towards girls' education**

Besides indirect measures of autonomy, direct indicators such as freedom of movement and control over resources show a significant impact on the existence of a favourable attitude towards girls' education in both the cultures (table 5). In most Indian societies, girls' education is adversely affected because they are required to assist their mothers in daily household chores. The boys on the other hand, are free from such responsibilities and are sent to schools. However, the situation seems to be changing along with the changing attitudes of women and the realization of the importance of education in the modern era. Respondents with some level of education favoured a reduced gap between boys' and girls' education. Women living in urban areas have shown a more favourable attitude towards girls' education compared to women living in rural areas. The idea that girls should receive as much education as boys has not been widely accepted in rural areas, even today.

**Table 5. Adjusted proportion of currently married women (usual residents of the household) who favour girls' education to be equal or more than the boys' education – Results from logistic regression analysis<sup>s</sup>**

Background characteristics	Uttar Pradesh			Tamil Nadu		
	Model-I	Model-II	Model-III	Model-I	Model-II	Model-III
<b>Decision-making in health care</b>						
Respondent not involved	62.7	62.1	64.3	60.9	61.9	61.9
Respondent involved	65.1	63.7	66.3*	60.1	60.8	60.9
<b>Freedom of movement</b>						
No complete freedom	62.4	61.6	64.0	55.6	56.2	55.9
Complete freedom	74.1***	72.8***	74.6***	64.8***	65.7***	66.0***
<b>Control over economic resources</b>						
No	61.1	62.4	65.1	61.7	64.2	64.1
Yes	66.2***	63.2	65.4	60.1	60.4*	60.6*
<b>Education</b>						
Illiterate		57.6	61.4		54.9	55.2
Literate up to middle		65.6***	66.7**		60.4***	61.1***
Middle+		78.9***	77.6***		70.9***	70.3***
<b>Occupation</b>						
Not working		63.8	66.0		63.5	63.5
Working not for cash		61.1*	64.2		58.6	59.4
Working for cash		57.3**	60.3**		59.4*	59.2*
<b>Place of residence</b>						
Urban		73.9	74.3		66.9	67.0
Rural		59.7***	62.6***		58.1***	58.1***
<b>Age difference between spouses</b>						
Little		63.0	65.3		61.5	61.6
Moderate		62.2	64.5		62.3	62.2
Big		63.4	66.6		57.8	58.0
<b>Education difference between spouses</b>						
Little		61.1	64.1		60.3	60.2
Moderate (5 classes)		62.6	65.2		61.4	61.6
Big (more than 5 years)		64.7**	66.2		61.9	62.0
<b>Caste</b>						
SC/ST			63.2			63.7
Others			65.8*			60.6
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindus			65.2			61.2
Non-Hindus			65.4			62.6
<b>Standard of living</b>						
Low			62.8			61.6
Medium			62.5			59.5
High			75.9***			65.9
<b>Type of family</b>						
Broken/Suppl. extended nuclear			65.1			62.5
Nuclear			63.8**			60.7
Joint without in-laws			65.0			62.3
Joint with in-laws			67.5			61.9

<sup>s</sup> controlled for age of the respondent

\*\*\* p<0.001    \*\* p<0.05    \* p<0.10

**Table 6. Adjusted proportion of currently married women (usual residents of the household) who are currently using family planning – Results from logistic regression analysis<sup>s</sup>**

Background characteristics	Uttar Pradesh			Tamil Nadu		
	Model-I	Model-II	Model-III	Model-I	Model-II	Model-III
<b>Decision-making in health care</b>						
Respondent not involved	38.9	66.7	62.3	45.8	75.6	79.8
Respondent involved	43.7***	68.3	64.0	50.8	74.4	78.9
<b>Freedom of movement</b>						
No complete freedom	40.0	67.2	62.7	43.4	74.1	78.6
Complete freedom	50.2***	69.0	65.4	53.6**	75.7	79.8
<b>Control over economic resources</b>						
No	36.0	65.9	61.7	40.7	76.3	81.0
Yes	45.9***	68.8**	64.3**	50.9	74.5	78.7
<b>Education</b>						
Illiterate		62.5	59.5		73.3	77.8
Literate up to middle		72.3	66.6***		77.7**	81.5**
Middle+		81.1	73.9***		75.2	79.7
<b>Occupation</b>						
Not working		66.7	62.4		75.6	80.0
Working not for cash		69.9	64.9		70.2**	74.1**
Working for cash		68.8	65.2		75.3	79.5
<b>Place of residence</b>						
Urban		76.2	72.2		78.0	81.9
Rural		64.9	60.5***		73.1***	77.7***
<b>Age difference between spouses</b>						
Little		66.2	61.8		74.9	79.2
Moderate		70.9	66.5***		76.2*	80.4
Big		65.6	61.3		71.3	76.1*
<b>Education difference between spouses</b>						
Little		63.8	61.0		75.7	80.3
Moderate (5 classes)		65.6	61.7		74.4	78.7
Big (more than 5 years)		72.1	66.2***		75.6	79.7
<b>Caste</b>						
SC/ST			62.8			77.8
Others			63.1			79.7
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindus			65.3			79.7
Non-Hindus			51.4***			75.9*
<b>Standard of living</b>						
Low			56.2			78.1
Medium			63.5***			79.9
High			71.8***			79.8
<b>Type of family</b>						
Broken/Suppl. extended nuclear			60.7			79.3***
Nuclear			65.1**			80.9***
Joint without in-laws			63.2			76.7***
Joint with in-laws			61.1			69.9

<sup>s</sup> controlled for age of the respondent

\*\*\* p<0.001 \*\* p<0.05 \* p<0.10

### **Contraceptive use**

The more education a woman has, the more likely she is to use contraceptive methods. This link between a woman's education level and contraceptive use is found to be strong. Furthermore, contraceptive use is greater among women living in urban areas than among women living in rural areas. Among the direct indicators of autonomy, women with greater control over economic resources use contraceptives more than women without control over resources. This is particularly evident in Uttar Pradesh (table 6). In short, the level of contraceptive use depends on women's autonomy, as well as the usual socioreligious characteristics.

### **Conclusion**

There exists a regional divide in the level of women's empowerment. As expected, women in Tamil Nadu have greater autonomy in making decisions regarding their own health care, freedom of movement and access to money. However, empowerment being a multidimensional concept, the results show some interesting variations. Women in Uttar Pradesh are found to have greater self-esteem in the sense that they are more critical about wife beating. A much higher proportion of women in Uttar Pradesh deny that a husband is justified in beating his wife under any of the six circumstances on which data was collected, compared to women in Tamil Nadu. Among the indirect measures of autonomy, education in particular is important and plays a positive role in enhancing different dimensions of autonomy. There are sociocultural variations in the level of empowerment. The type of family in which a woman lives has a strong association with the three direct measures of autonomy. Women staying in families with in-laws show a far lower level of autonomy than do women who live in other types of families

Of the three direct measures of autonomy, like involvement in decision-making, freedom of movement and access to money, women, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, have the least autonomy in terms of freedom of movement, which turns out to be an important indicator of the evidence of empowerment.

Further, women with education, particularly secondary education, and working women show greater self-esteem, have a favourable attitude towards girls' education and use contraceptives across cultures. Urban women as compared to rural women are more favourable towards girls' education and towards family planning methods. This divide indicates that there are two different societies that exist in India, a rural culture and an urban culture. In rural areas, the

lifestyle is oriented more towards the community than towards the family, while in urban areas, life is more individualistic and family-oriented. The degree of such adherence to societal norms and practices in rural areas is much stronger in Uttar Pradesh than in Tamil Nadu. Among the three selected direct indicators of empowerment, complete freedom of movement determines greater self-esteem and a more favourable attitude for girls' education to a great extent in both cultures.

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