

Determinants of Women's Decision-making Power in Sub-Saharan Africa and Consequences for the Use of their Time: A Survey of Previous Studies

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This paper surveys the empirical literature on women's decision-making autonomy in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on five countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, South Africa, and Tanzania. The paper also explores the theoretical connections between women's decision-making power and time use with the objective of understanding which factors influence women's decision-making autonomy and how that can impact their control over time in the sub-Saharan African context.

Empirical studies have on the one hand explored the determinants of women's decision-making power over aspects such as health, fertility, investment in children, and household finances and on the other hand shed light on the unequal division of household responsibilities and the burden of domestic work on women. Some have attempted to explore the determinants of such unequal division of labor within the household, but with a focus on how certain household characteristics help explain the observed unequal division of labor. Zacharias et. al (2021) find evidence that gender ideology plays a crucial role in explaining the burden of household production on women in sub-Saharan Africa. According to their findings, the most effective way of reducing the number of hours that women dedicate to household production would be to redistribute the work between partners. Even though it is very hard to directly impact intrahousehold dynamics through public policies, measures can be taken to empower women, increase their bargaining power and consequently lead to a fairer division of labor within the household.

Even though many authors have argued that gender ideology and bargaining power dynamics help explain the gendered division of time dedicated to household activities between partners, any attempt to empirically explore this connection encounters some considerable data challenges. The impossibility of measuring directly bargaining power has led some authors to explore how individual characteristics such as wealth, income, and education level—which are supposed to be correlated with bargaining power—impact the division of labor. Others have relied on multicountry studies to discuss how structural aspects of gender ideology help explain a fairer division of household tasks observed in some countries. This study identifies a gap in the empirical literature and proposes to better understand the data challenges. It also identifies from previous studies which factors impact women's empowerment and consequently could provide them with the autonomy of deciding how to spend their time. Therefore, this paper inserts itself within the literature of women's empowerment and decision-making but with a focus on time use. The main objective is to guide future studies and help to build an empirical strategy to further investigate the connections between women's individual autonomy, structural aspects of gender ideology, and time use to assist policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Many of the empirical studies that explore the decision-making power of women in the region, except for South Africa, utilize the DHS and focus on the health aspects of decision-making. In the case of Tanzania, Van Aelst (2014) uses general statistics from the DHS to discuss women's decision-making power. Similarly, Kishor and Subaiya (2008) do a comparative analysis of DHS data for multiple countries, including Ghana and Mali. Also, for Mali, Upadhyay and Karasek (2012) use the DHS to explore the correlations between women's decision-making and fertility. In the context of Ghana, Boateng et al. (2014) explore the impact of education on women's decision-making power while Darteh, Doku, and Esia-Donkoh (2014) explore the determinants of women's autonomy over their reproductive health. For Ethiopia, Woldemicael and Tenkorang (2010) study the effects of women's autonomy and individual and household characteristics on healthcare seeking, Ebrahim and Atteraya (2019) have explored the association between domestic violence and women's decision-making autonomy while Edossa, Debela, and Mizana (2020) assess women's decision-making status on contraceptive use. The

case of South Africa is peculiar given that the only DHS that contains questions regarding decision-making for that country was released in 2019. Thus studies using qualitative data (Willan et al. 2020) or other surveys (Osuafor, Maputle, and Ayiga 2018; Posel 2011) are more commonly used to study women's decision-making power in South Africa.

A high degree of inequality is still observed in that region despite the progress that has been made at the global level since the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015. According to the human development report from 2020 (UNPD 2020), sub-Saharan Africa has the highest gender inequality index (0.57) of all regions. Out of 189 countries, South Africa is in the 93rd position, Ethiopia is 125th, Ghana is 135th, Tanzania 140th, and Mali 158th. This reflects a huge gap between women's reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation. Unfortunately, within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, there have been very few attempts to analyze the determinants of decision-making power of women and none that explored the impact of that on time use.

Thus, it is essential to further investigate the determinants of women's lack of agency over decisions in general and decisions over the use of their time in particular to build effective public policies that can promote more equality in the region. The UN's 5th goal, "achieve gender equality and achieve empowerment of all women and girls," highlights three dimensions of gender inequality: women's participation in decision making, violence against women, and the burden of unpaid domestic and care work. This paper acknowledges the connection between all three dimensions and understands that women's empowerment is dependent on their control over time, which is deeply shaped by the burden of unpaid work, by their autonomy to make decisions, and by their relationship with others in the household.