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Research article

Assessment of Rural Women's Daily Activities, Life Satisfaction and Decision-making Power in Chitalmari Upazila of Bagerhat

Laxmi Rani Bashu*, Mohammad Bashir Ahmed and Md. Matiul Islam

Agrotechnology Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Women's unpaid care work, sense of family responsibility and type of income-generating activities influence their satisfaction level which was defined by their ability to make decisions. This study evaluated rural women's daily activities, life satisfaction and decision-making power using three frameworks: the Modified Thurstone Scale, Cantril Ladder and Pretty's Participation Spectrum. Data were collected from 120 women from villages, sub-urban areas and towns of Bangladesh. All of respondents were engaged in household work and on average 7.38 hours/day while two-fifth of them (40%) participated in cattle rearing and most (84%) were engaged in child-rearing. Women cared for children on average 5 to 10 hours daily. Women's contributions to agriculture post harvesting duration were significant, yet their role in marketing and pre-stage production was minimal. Among 20 decision-making indicators most women's involvement intensity was low on Pretty's Spectrum scale. Poor decision-making power persisted in critical areas like asset control, marriage, voting and education but women had strong participation in family nutrition, cooking, medical treatment, child stress handling and children education.

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Introduction

Understanding women's empowerment is not just about the amount of wealth they have or their decision-making power, but also about women's daily work, control over their own choices and satisfaction with life. While there is much research on women's empowerment, their time management patterns, happiness, level of participation and involvement in decision-making in their daily lives- all of those factors have rarely been analyzed together. Modified Thurstone scale, Cantril ladder and Pretty's participation spectrum methods can give us very nuanced and timely insights into the analysis of women's empowerment, but there has not been sufficient research on their use.

Assessment of rural women empowerment has many ways. Most of the existing literature focused on specific indicators based. According to Sverko and Galic (2014) empowerment criteria depended on author's goal and theories reviews. Malhotra and Schuler (2005) defined empowerment as a process to make choices and benefited from resources and opportunities and have a voice about public life and decision-making. Similarly with Malhotra and Schuler (2005), Swain and Wallentin (2009) also explained women empowerment as a process. Schuler et al. (2010) defined empowerment as women capacities, resources and agency. But Datta and Gailey (2012) focused on women economic security, improvement of enterprise behavior and women's supporting capabilities to family. Upadhye and Madan (2012) also expressed same view with. But Datta and Gailey (2012) added more such as overcoming existing social culture and norms and support family, even society. Hancock et al. (2014) identified specific domains to measure women economic empowerment by defining the areas of women participation such as women holding amount of capital and their buying ability for herself or family, how they can participate in communities and political activities, how women can participate within home and outside home in decision-making. But Rathiranee and Semasinghe (2015) defined women empowering with equal right as men in society and economy such as the areas of power, authority and resources sharing. Chatterjee et al. (2018) defined empowering women with new indicators such as ability to decide children's marriage and education, decided to access resources and property and even to stand against the evils of society. Ambepitiya and Gao (2019) also focused on asset controlling by women, political participation even access to employment, self-consumption decisions,

*Corresponding author: <laxmibasuat09ku@gmail.com>
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education of herself decision and income generating opportunities improvements.

According to (Narayanan and Selvanathan (2017)) women empowerment refers to have power and control in life leading in social movement, education and politics to gain gender equality. (Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013)) found that women can be empowered through enterprise such as business from home which help them to create self-identity, making decision, reducing poverty and to gaining economic well off. But (Arnoff (2011)) considered measuring empowerment various factors might be changed over time. Acharjee et al. (2015) studied data from the 'Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) and found that not all women in Bangladesh were equally empowered. Some factors such as age, education, employment, wealth, religion and husband age highly influences women empowerment status. The study by Eerdewijk et al. (2017) supported Kabeer's (2002) Three-Dimensional Model of women's empowerment. Another study by Sony et al. (2020) found that socioeconomic, environmental and cultural factors were connected and affect how people behave and how empowered they feel. Mehra et al. (2023) studied Gender-Based Violence and found that women having no children were more likely to experience sexual violence. Controlling behaviour from a spouse was strongly connected to both physical violence (three times more likely) and sexual violence (four times more likely) and rural women faced more physical torture. Taşli (2007) identified eight empowerment indicators: mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, political and legal awareness, involvement in major purchases, health decisions, perception of decision-making power. Peters et al. (2016) collected Web of Science and EconLit 400 articles and found that women do more likely unpaid works such as taking care of home, cooking and raising children for the family but generally men do not actively participate. According to Lama (2014), women in India spend around 10 to 12 hours each day on unpaid household tasks like cooking and taking care of kids, in addition to their low-paying jobs. Empowerment was a complex idea that affects how people feel and what they aim to achieve. Brajesh and Shekhar (2015) used data from surveys in India, Nepal and Bangladesh to create a Women's Empowerment Index. The authors grouped women into three categories based on their level of empowerment: low, medium and high. The authors valued different factors like age, education, income and media use to see how they relate to empowerment. In many areas of South Asia, women usually have less said in important decisions. (Mahmud et al. (2012)) found from 128 villages of Bangladesh and measured four aspects of empowerment and these were self-esteem, participation in household decisions, freedom to move around and control over material resources. Kabeer (2002) and Chant (2008) told that women's time burdens and unpaid care work were often ignored in development plans though empowerment was connected to how women spend their time, how women choice and how women have about their roles and how much control they have over daily routine. According to Cornwall and Rivas (2015) a development policy can take a transformative related to psychological and life satisfaction of the women. Diener et al. (2018) paid heed to subjective well-being such as life satisfaction, personal agency, decision-making and involvement in society. But Agarwal (2011) heeded to power dynamics inside households and decision-making as key signs of empowerment. Though UN Women (2019) focused on decision-making, unpaid care work and how time was used in families across the world and ILO (2018) also focused the burden of unpaid care work and its effect on women's ability to join the workforce.

This paper is not only focused on the participation rather how much involvement intensity women have who are engaged in agricultural sectors. Three scales are used for measuring involvement intensity. Thurstone scale was used for 10 indicators in women household and agricultural involvement intensity, Transposed Cantril Ladder was used for measuring women life satisfaction on 12 indicators and Pretty's participation scale was used for analyzing 20 indicators in decision making indicators. This study is rational as this paper reveals how actively women participating within the mentioned areas and how much women are satisfied by participating in agricultural sectors. The author found that the process of women's empowerment was not well understood, even though there was a lot of research on it (Mahmud et al. (2012)) and according to Sverko and Galic (2014), empowerment criteria depend on author's goal and theories reviews.

Objectives:

The author has tried to investigate the answer of rural women time spend as well as intensity of involvement in both household and agricultural works through Thurstone Scale, women life satisfaction involvement through Transposed Cantril Ladder Scale and women decision-making power also had been analyzed through Pretty's Participation Spectrum.

The main objectives were:

- **i.** To assess the time spent of rural women's daily household and agricultural activities
- **ii.** To assess the intensity of involvement of women participation rate in daily household and agricultural activities by Thurstone scale
- **iii.** To analyze the level of women's satisfaction by Transposed Cantril Ladder Scale
- **iv.** To analyze women's participation rate in decision-making and its intensity using Pretty's Participation Spectrum

Research Limitations:

This paper is a cross-sectional study. Sample size was small due to resources limitations.

Research Gaps:

Previous researches on rural women largely observed household activities, life satisfaction and decision-making power individually rather than as associated sides of women's lives. Many studies used standard Likert scales or simple binary responses, which often failed to seize the varying intensity of women's involvement and participation. Moreover, the combined dedication of

Modified Thurstone Scale, Cantril Ladder and Pretty's Participation Spectrum has scarcely ever been used in rural women-focused research. Therefore, a methodological and conceptual gap exists in understanding rural women's daily activities, well-being and empowerment together. This study tackles that gap by using an integrated and contextual framework to provide a more nuanced assessment of rural women's lived experiences.

Materials and Methods

The study followed a descriptive and diagnostic research design (Kothari (2004)) to evaluate women's participation. This paper has analyzed a cross-sectional survey data. This paper assesses rural women participation in household, agriculture as well as their decision-making indicators and their life satisfaction using three frameworks: Thurstone scale, transposed Cantril ladder and Pretty's participation scale were used for the assessment of women's involvement intensity in household and agricultural activities, for measuring women's life satisfaction and for analyzing decision making indicators respectively.

Study Area

The selection of Chitalmari Upazila as the study location was based on purposive sampling, considering its demographic and socioeconomic relevance to women's empowerment issues in rural Bangladesh as rural women's participation in agricultural works and their decision-making capability. The upazila is divided into seven union parishads named Barabaria, Char Baniari, Chitalmari, Hizla, Santoshpur, Kalatala and Shibpur**.**

Study period:

Data collection was carried out over a three-month period from October to December 2023.

Sample Size

A total of 120 respondents were purposively selected for the research due to resource constraints. But even though the number was selected for 120 people, the researcher was unbiased. The number was kept at 120 for convenience. There was resource limitation in this case.

Sampling Technique

The researcher collected samples by multistage and a stratified random sampling technique due to capture women who were belonged to specific in seven union parishads and had participation in agriculture and awared about the concept of women participation. To prepare a population list, administrative voter lists were collected from members and chairman from respective areas. The researcher took women of all types from all categories according to age (Young, middle and old) and education (Illiterate, moderately literate and highly literate) and who were involved in agricultural activities.

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was made to collect primary data from the respondents. Before interview the respondents were informed the purpose of the study. The researcher used survey method for data collection where there were 120 respondents. The researcher also conducted focus group discussions (FGD) with a total of 30 people in 3 groups of 10 to do pilot survey and for developing questionnaire. As a key informant interviews (KII), chairman and members helped the author to detect women who were from agricultural background, having primary knowledge about empowerment. The author also discussed with the local people to know the situation of the women socio-economic conditions of the respondents.

Methods used for data analysis

Modified Thurstone scale for the magnitude of involvement in daily activities

The survey provided a comprehensive picture of women's daily life activities by using Thurstone scale (modified). The Thurstone scale was used to determine the behavior, feelings or attitude of a respondent about a issue (Sauser (2010)).

Table 1: Modified Thurstone scale for the magnitude of involvement in daily activities

Position	Common descriptor	Intensity level of involvement	Typical interpretation
0	Extremely unfavorable	Lowest / No involvement	Complete absence or severe negativity/struggling
1-2	Very unfavorable	Minimal involvement	Severe struggling or strong opposition
3-4	Moderately unfavorable	Low involvement	Struggling with basic needs or negative lean
5	Neutral / Moderate	Moderate or indifferent	Basic needs met; balanced or functional participation
6-7	Moderately Favorable	Good involvement	Thriving somewhat; positive lean or interactive
8-9	Very favorable	High involvement	Near best; strong support or self-mobilization
10	Extremely favorable	Highest / Full involvement	Complete thriving or strongest endorsement

Source: Sauser (2010)

Cantril Ladder for life satisfaction:

The happiness of people around the world can be measured, and it's not just a made-up idea. It's a method that was widely accepted and used around the world. This method was called the Cantril Ladder Survey, developed by Cantril in 1965.

Figure 1: Cantril Ladder for life satisfaction **(**Source: Cantril, 1965)

Table 2: Cantril Ladder scale explanation

Ladder step	Description	Example rural context interpretation
0-3	**Worst possible life**	Severe poverty, limited autonomy, high workload without support.
4-6	**Moderate life**	Basic needs met, but persistent challenges in decision-making.
7-10	**Best possible life**	High satisfaction from empowerment and balanced activities.

Pretty's Participation Spectrum:
Pretty's Participation Spectrum was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the people's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally and it is found in many public participation plans.

Table 3: Pretty's Participation Spectrum explanation

Pretty's number	Participation level	Characteristics
1	Manipulative	Pretend to involvement; no real power.
2	Passive	Informed but no input.
3	Consultation	Views sought but not necessarily acted upon.
4	Material incentives	Contribute for rewards, no stake.
5	Functional	Groups formed for external goals.
6	Interactive	Joint analysis and control.
7	Self-mobilization	Independent initiatives.

Pretty's Participation Spectrum (modified) for decision-making power

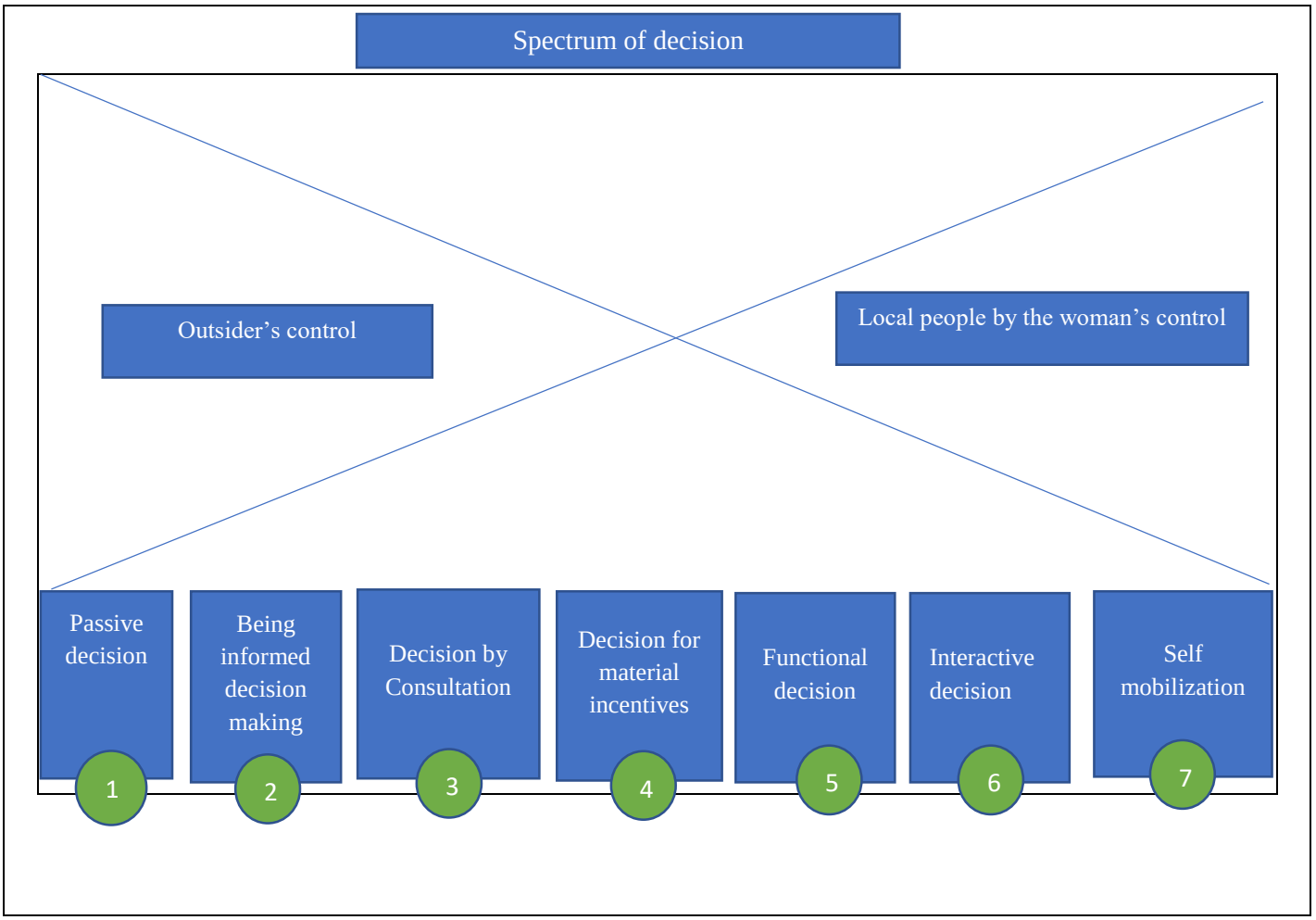

Figure 2: Pretty's Participation Spectrum (modified) for decision-making power (Source: Pretty, 1995)

Table 4: Pretty's Participation Spectrum explanation

Pretty's number	Participation level	Characteristics
1	Manipulative	Pretend to involvement; no real power.
2	Passive	Informed but no input.
3	Consultation	Views sought but not necessarily acted upon.
4	Material incentives	Contribute for rewards, no stake.
5	Functional	Groups formed for external goals.
6	Interactive	Joint analysis and control.
7	Self-mobilization	Independent initiatives.

Conceptual framework among empowerment, involvement intensity, satisfaction level and decision-making power of women:

Satisfaction level, involvement intensity and decision-making power were measured using the Cantril Ladder, Thurstone scale and Pretty's Participation Spectrum respectively. If these three points can be brought to one point, that would be called like an empowerment. Then this would be the empirical integration of the three frameworks or conceptual framework.

Statistical analysis tools

Data were analyzed using Microsoft office 2016's Excel sheet for data entry. The author also used SPSS version 26, Stata version 17and R version 4.5.1 for data analysis and graphics. and Spearman rho correlation was used to measure relationship among empowerment and housework hours, Decision-making power, satisfaction level and involvement of women in household and agricultural activities.

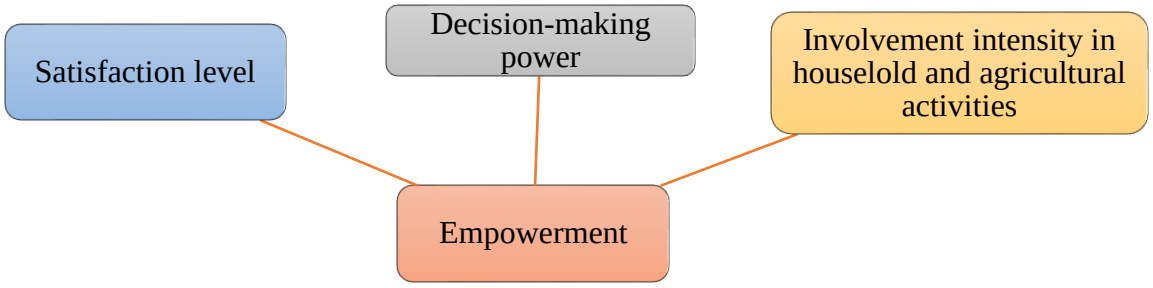

Figure 3: Conceptual framework among empowerment, involvement intensity, satisfaction level and decision-making power of women

Results

Measuring the time women spend on household and agricultural activities is vital for understanding their participation and intensity level of involvement. Table 4 analyzes the average number of hours spent by women on participation in these activities.

Table 5: Average time spend duration of the women in household and agricultural activities

Time spend duration on daily activities					
Activities Duration	**Observation**	**Mean**	**±SD**	**Min**	**Max**
Household Work	120	7.38	2.86	1	13
Agriculture Work	67	3.39	1.37	0	7
Pre-stage	46	2.61	1.18	0	4
Crop Standing	30	2.37	1.13	0	4
Crop Post-harvest	64	5.28	1.69	0	8
Crop Marketing	3	1.00	1.00	0	2
Cattle Rearing	45	1.93	0.84	0	4
Fish Farming	43	1.07	0.40	0	2
Poultry Farming	56	1.02	0.23	0	2
Child Rearing	101	6.59	5.54	1	16

Note: SD=Standard Deviation; Min=Minimum; Max=Maximum

The survey revealed that all the respondents spent an average of at least 7 hours on household works such as cooking, washing etc. though they also participated in agricultural activities for an average of 3 hours on a daily basis. Some women considered agricultural activities as a part time job, that's why they did not respond to their time spent properly. But most women participated more during the post-harvest period than in the pre-harvest and standing crop stages. After crop harvesting season, women spent an average of at least 5 hours on agricultural activities, which is the highest level of involvement compared to other agricultural stages. About 84% women shifted their time to child rearing and spent at least 6 to 10 hours daily for this and crop marketing participation was the lowest by the women. Although women participated in agricultural work, it was temporary, as they engaged in it on a part-time basis.

Women participation rate in household and agricultural works:

Some women participated in agricultural works as full-time workers, while others worked part-time in crop production, poultry and fish farming.

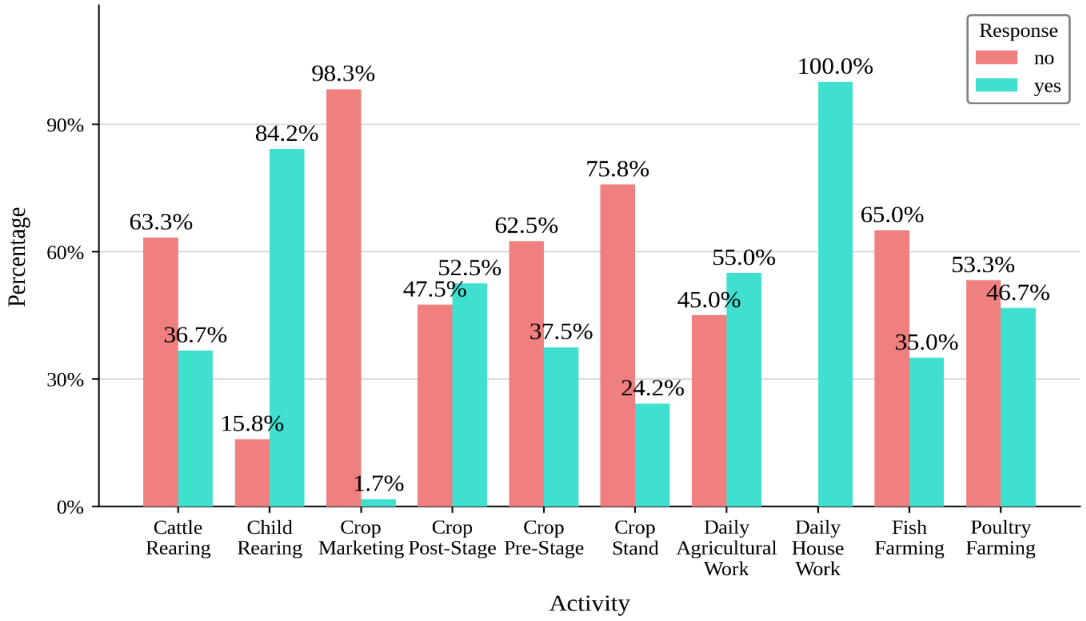

Figure 4: Women participation rate in household and agricultural works

According to figure 4 all the respondents actively participated most in household activities and child rearing but crop marketing that is selling agricultural products were the lowest participation. Generally, men are responsible for selling agri-products. The figure 4 indicates that most of the women took agricultural activities as a part time job rather than full time involvement. Still fish farming, poultry farming and crop farming activities were below 50% and only after crop harvest participation rate was above 50%. According to FAO (2011) rural women had significant involvement in agricultural works specifically in livestock rearing and child rearing all over the world. The ILO (2018) reported that women spent significant time on unpaid care and household works.

Women involvement intensity rate in household and agricultural work based on Thurstone scale (0-9):
How actively the women involved in household and agriculture activities were investigated by applying Thurstone scale rating from 0-9 where 0 indicates passive participation and 9 indicates full active participation.

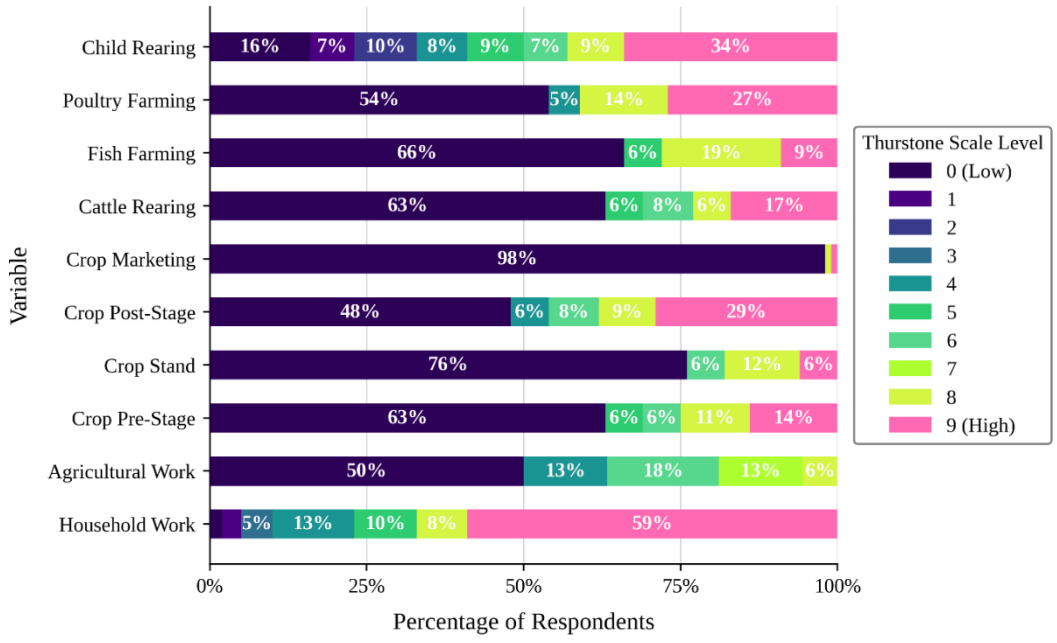

Figure 5: Women involvement intensity rate in household and agricultural work based on Thurstone scale (0-9)

The figure 5 shows the involvement intensity of women of only those respondents who participated in activities. According to the figure 5, women actively participated in household works and child rearing but passive involvement intensity was found in other agricultural works. Women's participation in agriculture was still not active rather it was largely passive, such as through part-time work.

Women Satisfaction level rating

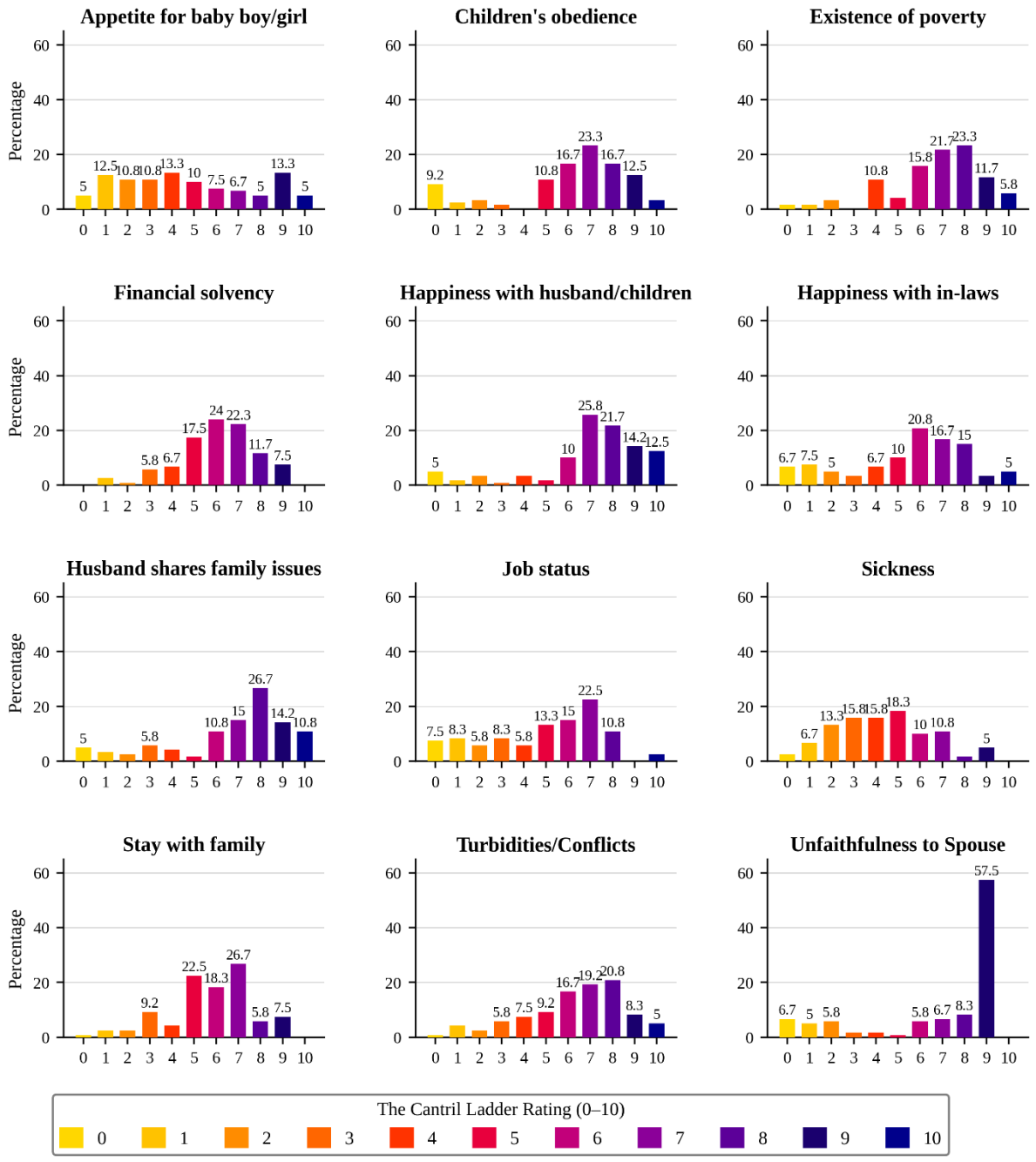

Figure 6: The Cantril Ladder Rating

The Cantril Ladder is a visual tool used to measure general life satisfaction (Cantril, 1965). People were shown a picture of a ladder with scores from 0 to 10, where 0 means the worst life satisfaction and 10 means the best. This paper measured different 12 aspects of women's satisfaction. Preference for having a baby boy or girl were fairly distributed across the scale, indicating that there was no strong consensus among the women on this issue. But women were satisfied with children's obedience but a small group faced challenges. Most of the women were also satisfied despite the existence of poverty, which indicated that they were always ready to accomodate. Women satisfaction's domains were happy with husband, family financial situation and sharing family issues with husband. Even women did not regret with present job status and staying with present family, they were not bored. This indicates that most women had a moderate level of life satisfaction but were going towards high.

Proportion of women's decision-making domain using Pretty's Participation Spectrum (modified)

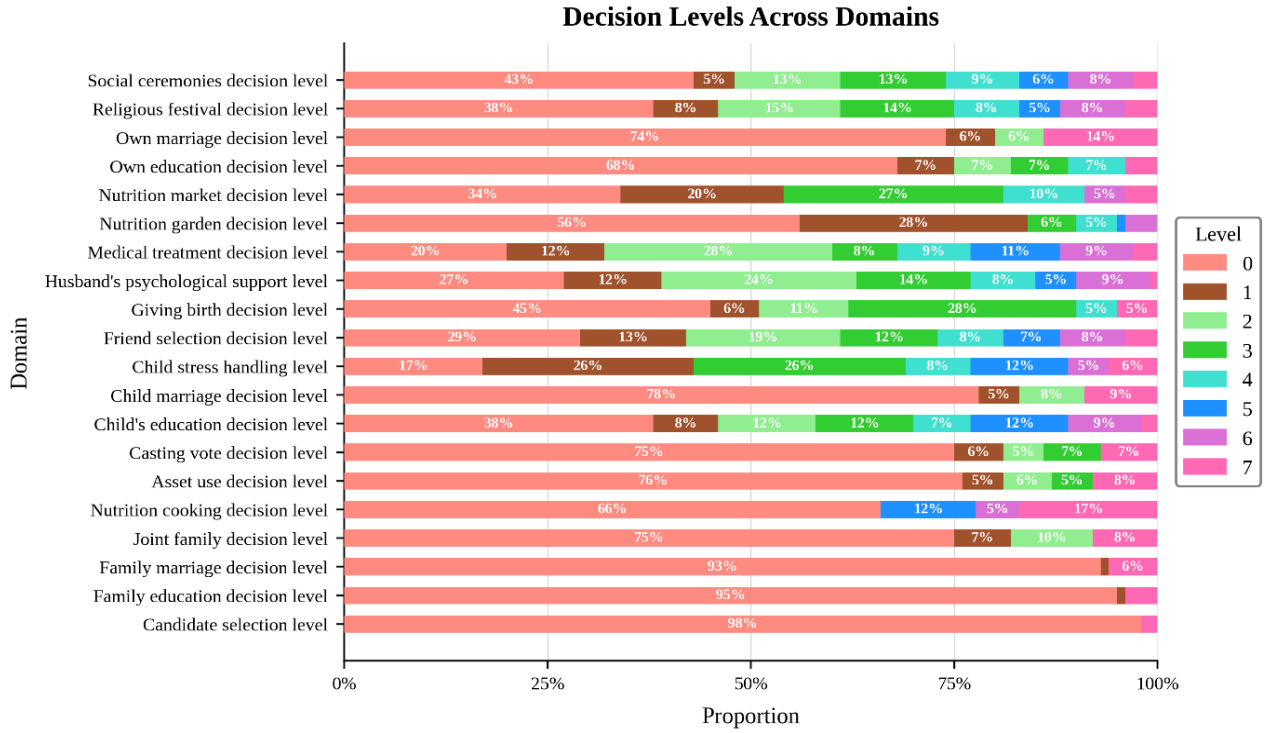

Figure 7: Proportion of women's decision-making domain using Pretty's Participation Spectrum (modified)

Women's access in decision-making throughout various spheres of daily life was presented in figure 7 using Pretty's Participation Spectrum (modified). Pretty (1995) proposed a model of community participation that consists of three categories named- manipulative participation, passive participation and self-mobilization. The graph presented in figure 7 visualizes women's level of participation across twenty key household, familial, social and economic decision-making domains, using Pretty's Participation Spectrum (modified) as the interpretive framework. Each domain measures the degree of involvement on a scale from 0 to 7, where **0** denotes no participation which implying that decisions were made entirely by others and 1 to 7 represent an ordinal continuum from the lowest to the highest level of active engagement and control by women. Most of the women had minimum participation in decision-making in candidate selection for vote, family member's education, family member's or children's marriage decisions or even own marriage, own education and joint family decision. Above 90% of women reported no participation in family marriage, political and electoral choices and were overwhelmingly external to women's influence. But women significantly participated in family nutrition, nutrition garden, nutrition market, children's stress handling and medical treatment decisions. Women also took decisions for social ceremonies, religious festivals, husband's psychological support, giving child birth decisions but participation levels were in the lower level. Nutrition cooking decision was in the highest-level of participation for women and asset use decision was not much satisfactory for women. The figure 7 exposed that women's participation in decisions-making domains was weak.

Composite Index Constructions

To measure the spearman rho correlation, the study constructed three composite indices named a composite decision-making index, composite satisfaction index and composite involvement intensity of household and agricultural activities index. Before the making indices the study did internal consistency a reliability test by Cronbach's alpha. If Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.7, combining them into one index is statistically justified. The internal consistency of the women's decision-making power scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha with 20 decision-making variables. The result ($\alpha = 0.895$) indicated very high reliability, suggesting that the items consistently measure the same underlying construct. Similarly, satisfaction level intensity Cronbach's alpha was 0.8530 of 12 satisfaction variables and involvement in household-agricultural activities level intensity Cronbach's alpha was 0.8096 of 10 household-agricultural variables. Therefore, three separate composite indices were constructed by averaging the items respectively. Then, three composite indices were constructed from the three separate indices using the following formula:

$$\text{Index value} = (\text{Score} - \text{Minimum Score}) / (\text{Maximum Score} - \text{Minimum Score})$$

Women Empowerment index construction

The average scores of decision-making index, satisfaction index and involvement in household- agricultural activities index were estimated as women empowerment index.

Table 6: Spearman rho correlation among five variables

Variables	(1) Empowerment index	(2) House Work hours	(3) Decision-making index	(4) Satisfaction index	(5) Involvement intensity in household and agricultural activities index
(1) Empowerment index	1.000				
(2) House work hours	0.168*	1.000			
(3) Decision-making index	0.750***	-0.096	1.000		
(4) Satisfaction index	0.657***	-0.046	0.610***	1.000	
(5) Involvement intensity in household and agricultural activities	0.500***	0.452***	-0.019	-0.125	1.000

The table 6 shows a Spearman rho correlation analyzing the relationships among five variables. Women empowerment has strong positive correlation with decision-making power, satisfaction level and involvement intensity in household and agricultural activities, which are 1% level of significant but women in housework hours has low positive correlation with empowerment and it is 10% level of significant.

Discussion:

The research paper showed an image of how the rural women in Bangladesh distributed their daily time among various activities, illustrating the extent and variety of their household tasks. The findings indicated that household tasks took up the majority of their time, averaging 7.38 hours per day, emphasizing the significant role of unpaid domestic labour in their lives. This aligns with national statistics from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS (2021)), which noted that women spent an average of 6.8hours each day on unpaid domestic and care work, compared to just 1.6hours for men. This reflected the ongoing gender disparity in time allocation and highlighted how deeply household duties were ingrained in the social roles of women in rural Bangladesh.

The study also found that childcare was a significant time commitment for women, averaging 6.59hours per day. This finding was consistent with global evidence indicating that women bear a disproportionate share of care work. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO (2018)), women performed 76.2% of all unpaid care work worldwide, spending about 4hours and 25 minutes per day which was three times more than men.

The variation observed in childcare time in the present study (standard deviation of 5.54) may be attributed to differences in family structure, the number of dependents and access to childcare support in rural households. The substantial time investment in domestic chores and care work limits women's opportunities to engage in paid employment, education or community activities, a phenomenon widely noted in gender and development literature (Ferrant et al. (2014)). Besides doing unpaid work, rural women also played a major role in productive labor, especially in farming and after harvest tasks, where they spent 5.28 hours and 3.39 hours each day, respectively. Similar findings were found by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO (2006)), which highlighted that women make up almost half of the agricultural work in developing countries, but they were usually assigned to hard, low paid tasks.

This study showed that the involvement of women in selling crops and participating in market activities were very limited and there were only three respondents participating, spending an average of one hour. This proved the existence of gender barriers in decision-making and participation in market activities. Research by Mahmud and Tasneem (2011) and Sen et al. (2022) also showed that contributions of rural women in agriculture were large but not properly valued but they were rarely included in financial or marketing decisions. Women were involved in various livestock and fishing activities, such as cattle raring (1.93hours), fish farming (1.07hours) and poultry rearing (1.02hours).

This study showed how rural women perform different types of work in their day-to-day life. Though these jobs were often seen as part of regular household chores, the women were very important for making sure people had enough food and for earning more money.

The results showed that women in rural Bangladesh have a heavy workload. Women do both unpaid housework and productive jobs. But they were not involved in decision making about how to make money. This pattern was similar to what was seen nationally and around the world when it comes to how much value was given to different types of work and how much say women had in making decisions. Recognizing and reducing unpaid work by implementing specific policies, like time saving infrastructure, childcare work and gender focused agricultural initiatives, were important for researching gender equality and establishing sustainable rural growth, as highlighted by the UNDP (2022).

The low level of involvement of women in marketing, livestock, fish and poultry farming and beginning stages of agricultural work matched findings from Bangladesh and in these sectors, women were highly involved in farming and household tasks, but their participation in market activities, decision-making and asset ownership was

significantly low. For instance, one study noted that women in Bangladesh rarely control the land or the sale of their produce and cattle. Even though they make the large part of total agricultural work (ESCAP (2023)).

The limited involvement of women in earlier crop activities and marketing was consistent with remaining works showing that women's participation in formal agricultural labour markets remains very low in Bangladesh. For example, one research found that only about 1% of women involve in formal agricultural activities, compared with about 23% of men (Jaim and Hossain (2011)). The results revealed that women were heavily engaged in household duties, care work and some farming tasks reflect broader evidence that women's work tends to be concentrated in domestic and care related sectors, as well as in physically demanding farming tasks, rather than in policy making or market-oriented roles. For example, research on rural Bangladesh highlights women's double responsibility of unpaid care and farm labour (Islam et al. (2022)).

The laggings of women's participation in livestock, fish and poultry were consistent with a recent study in Bangladesh, which found that while women's involvement in livestock farming can be empowering such as less access to asset, marketing management and most importantly decision-making power (Nath et al. (2024)).

The results aligned with the Cantril Ladder and similar scales indicators like life satisfaction responses tend to cluster in the upper part of the scale, though there was considerable variation among individuals and through different sectors of their life. For example, one study highlighted that globally more than a six portion of total population scores 3 or less, while the rest score 8 or higher on a scale from 0 to 10 (Layard and Neve (2023)).

Beside that the Cantril Ladder indicated that data-based factors like health, wealth and other individual perceptions including personal expectations and life domains influence life satisfaction. For instance, the report 'International Evidence on the Social Context of Well-being' states that social status was as indicative as income in explaining life satisfaction (Helliwell et al. (2009)). The observation suggested that many people pointed moderate levels of satisfaction (5-8) rather than very high levels (9-10) in various spheres, which relates with the literature highlighting that life satisfaction was limited by both personal expectations and wider societal factors. The existing literature about Cantril Ladder recognizes that even in developed countries which are improve in GDP or income typically show reduced gains in life satisfaction levels. As an example, a summary of our world in data findings that the 0-10 ladder was used worldwide, however, those rankings were entirely based on survey responses, where the variations were not directly connected to income only (Ortiz-ospina et al. (2024)).

Pretty's participation revealed the movement of people from being passive or having low involvement to remain full control or taking steps independently without any assistance (Cornwall (2008)). In certain parts of household women's involvement was high though they didn't have entire control. This might reflect that women were moving toward the mid position of the participation scale. However, they still lacked complete influence on significant decisions or being empowered to act independently.

Various studies on women's decision-making power showed that our women were mostly involved in daily household activities but not in significant decisions like money management, land or education for children. As an example, recent research found that rural women had less involvement in daily task like cooking and child care (Kirkwood et al. (2024)). These findings matched with the pattern like women were mostly involved with the areas connected to food, nutrition and childrearing but hardly in sectors related to social, economic and public decisions such as selecting candidates, utilizing assets or planning marriages. This revealed that traditional gender norms, access to resources and inequity in power prevent women's participation in upper-level decisions. The fact is that women's involvement is higher in the areas that are recognized as female areas of traditional roles in our society. But they don't have the freedom to involve in male areas. This pattern of involvement differences across areas was validated by a blend of qualitative and quantitative studies on gender and decision making (Lwamba et al. (2022)). Regarding child education and marriage, women's involvement showed greater variation. These areas involved overlapping decisions and were shaped by longstanding traditions, norms and assets, which reduces the extent of women's involvement.

Conclusion

The paper revealed through the Thurstone scale that women's participation in agricultural activities was not active rather passive but household work participation was active. Women showed variation in the decision-making. Among twenty decision indicators, seven are very weak. such as family member's marriage, family member's education, voting and candidate selection, children's marriage, even women own marriage decision. Strong decision-making areas included nutrition, cooking, children's stress handling and medical treatment decisions. The findings suggested that women still face challenges in decision-making, women treat agricultural activities as a part time job rather than a full-time job and women engage in a wide range of activities from agriculture to household work as well as child rearing.

Policy recommendations

- Strengthen women's involvement in household and community level decision-making process.
- Alleviate the burden of unpaid work by expanding rural support infrastructure.
- Accelerate economic empowerment through skill development and commercial pathways.
- Integrate women's subjective well-being into rural into the core agenda of rural development frameworks.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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