

Delhi School of Economics

Impact of MGNREGS on Women Empowerment

A case study of Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh

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Introduction

As cited in the official bill, NREGA 2005 was enacted *to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.*

The Act places special emphasis in its guidelines on women in that it provides for equal wages to both men and women and necessitates a reservation to the extent of 33% of the jobs. The scheme also makes mandatory the provision of work within a five kilometre radius, the failure of which leads to an increased wage payment by 10%; crèches for children; drinking water; shade, which have all turned out to be conducive for the womenfolk. The Act ensures that women and men are paid equally through electronic transfers, thus doing away with any middlemen who could potentially extort the wages from the labourers. The NREGA work mainly entails work which helps in developing rural infrastructure and asset building. Thus, works such as building canals, wells, brick pathways, etc. are mainly undertaken.

For the entire country 51% of the person days generated were women person days, the highest proportion of women person days being 93% of total person days in the state of Kerala, while the lowest being 20% in Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh except Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli where zero person days of work were generated for the year 2012-13¹.

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state of the country with a population of 19.98crores with 37.2% of the population being rural females². Thus, the importance of studying the pattern of women participation and benefits from MGNREGS cannot be overstated. We feel that if the positive impact of the scheme on the lives of rural women, direct or indirect, can be observed in the state with such poor participation rates, then at least these many positive effects will hold true for states which have better participation rates and are at the most this conservative.

The importance of women participation in any scheme is brought out especially if one considers the stigmas of the traditional rural Indian society such as women leaving the house alone, let alone working and especially the kind of work attained by following a process requiring interaction with strangers.

Some believe that women empowerment is an unintended consequence of the Scheme; however, it is a fact that employment guarantee has paved the way for greater independence and self-esteem of rural women, who are an exemplification of the oppression that the culture and traditions of the Indian society poses against these life-givers.

¹ <http://nrega.nic.in/>

² <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/>

MGNREGS is special for the kind of self-selection opportunity that it provides which no other scheme in the country does. In order to capture the demand for work successfully, it is mandatory that Rozgar Divas be held every month, possibly at the ward level. The aim is to provide employment to all the job seekers. *The event is for registering demand for work, issue of job cards, allocation of work, disclosure of information, payment of wages, payment of unemployment allowance, etc. and to generate awareness about the programme*³.

Yet, a large amount of rationing is evidenced for reasons rarely known⁴. Rationing is believed to be due to various reasons such as lack of awareness in the poorer states, mismatch between demand and supply especially enhanced with men and women competing for manual labour where men generally have an advantage, incapability of state institutions to implement MGNREGS effectively. Thus, the high demand for work and less capacity to implement MGNREGA may lead to a build-up of a vicious cycle for the poorer states⁵. Further, the rationing is also attributed to conscious efforts of state governments to not distort market wages during particular seasons. We find that with rationing in place, employment guarantee in the field far from being demand driven is actually a supply driven scheme and this finding is supported by other recent studies⁶.

The paper is organised as follows: **Section 1 Literature Review** which highlights some of the existing literature on the subject and explains the significance of this research; followed by **Section 2 Aim** which mentions the purpose of research; followed by **Section 3 Research Methodology** which talks about the methods followed during the course of this research; followed by **Section 4 Empowerment** which discusses briefly the definitions and concepts of empowerment followed during the course of study; followed by **Section 5 Data** which gives details about the data collected; **Section 6 Experience from the Field** which gives details about our findings from the field; **Section 7 Regression Analysis** which analyses the determinants of women empowerment; **Section 8 Summary** which concludes the study. Lastly, the **Appendix** includes some case studies and the questionnaire that we used to construct our empowerment measuring variables.

Literature Review

Some of the existing literature closely associated with the area of women empowerment includes work by Reetika Khera, Nandini Nayak (2009) which is based on field surveys conducted in six states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) in 2008 studying the socio-economic consequences of the NREGA for women workers, drawbacks in the implementation of the legislation, barriers to women's participation with a special focus on single women; Ashok Pankaj, Rukmini Tankha (2010) which examines the empowerment effects of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh using a field

³Guidelines for Rozgar Diwas vide circular J-II012/02/2012-MGNREGA issued by Ministry of Rural Development MGNREGA Division. 17 October 2013.

⁴Yanyan Liu, Christopher B Barrett (2013), Reetika Khera and Nandini Nayak (2009)

⁵MGNREGA Sameeksha (2012), Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

⁶Imbert, Clement and Papp, John. February 2013. Labor Market Effects of Social Programs: Evidence from India's Employment Guarantee. CSAE Working Paper WPS/2013-03.

survey. It argues that women workers have gained from the scheme primarily because of the paid employment opportunity, and benefits have been realised through income-consumption effects, intra-household effects, and the enhancement of choice and capability; Jean Dreze, Reetika Khera (2009) wherein the authors explore issues related to MGNREGS such as transparency, creation of useful assets and labour conditions at the work sites on the basis of field surveys in six states (Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan); Maithrey Krishnaraj, Divya Pandey, Aruna Kanchi (2004) which reviews the EGS of Maharashtra with a special focus on gender issues, among others. EGS initiated in Maharashtra in the early 1970s is the oldest and the largest public works programme in the developing world. This article reviews the EGS to assess whether it requires restructuring for poverty alleviation and gender equality; Azeez, N.P. Abdul and Akhtar, S.M. Jawed (2012) which talks about how NREGA has helped in women empowerment (employment) in Kerala in originally unintended ways; Erlend Berg, D Rajasekhar, R Manjula (2013) which focuses primarily on corruption in MGNREGS and highlights an important finding that female headed households are more likely to be 'ghost worker households' under MGNREGS; Ratna M Shankar (2011) which explores the reasons for women's participation in the scheme varying significantly across and within states of Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and suggests improvements that could maximize impact. Also, he suggests minor changes to the scheme to address local development challenges that could deliver better outcomes; Asha Sharma (2012) finds that by putting cash earnings in women's hands, especially from this section of the society has both increased and diversified the contribution that women are making to households income on wage earners. Kamla Gupta and P. Princy Yesudian (2006) used NFHS to create four indices—household autonomy index, mobility index, attitude towards gender index and attitude towards domestic violence index to measure the different dimensions of empowerment. We have also used this approach to measure empowerment and attitudinal shift as a result of MGNREGS.

It is found that there is no recent paper with the specific focus of analysing women empowerment especially in the state with poorest participation and women participation rate. Reetika Khera and Nandini Nayak (2009) is a good, although dated example of such a study.

Aim

1. To analyse whether the MGNREGS has contributed to women empowerment in the areas under study or not by comparing female participants with female non-participants.
2. To identify the conditions, local and official responsible for the observed pattern of women participation at the block level.

Research Methodology

This research is carried out in two steps namely, household survey and analysis of data collected from the field. The survey is aimed at capturing empowerment of women participants and non-participants through a set of standard questions with multiple choices

and marks attached to each (details in Appendix). The questions were framed so as to capture normative as well as positive aspects of various small things in their lives⁷. Broadly, the questions can be classified into the following five categories- Household Autonomy, Mobility, Social Attitudes, Personal Attitudes, Domestic Violence. Apart from these the questionnaire also includes general questions which enabled us to put things in perspective and ensure credibility of the responses. Questions included in these categories are given in the Appendix. For further details on how these categories were exploited, see the following sub-section on Empowerment.

All the questions in any particular category had equal weights, and could fetch 0, 0.5 or 1 mark. The score of each category for any individual was calculated as the marks obtained divided by the total number of questions that were applicable to that person and for which the response was recorded. For example, widow and unmarried participants and non-participants could not be scored on domestic violence, and in certain cases some questions could not be asked or understood by the respondent. While recognising the element of arbitrariness that is introduced by this, we accept that this may weaken the reliability of results. However, we feel that this pattern was random and infrequent and would not bias the estimates in a systematic manner. By construction, the score lies between 0 and 10.

Next, we regress the scores obtained for the four categories- Household Autonomy, Mobility, Social Attitudes, and Personal Attitudes- on participation dummy, religion dummy, marital status dummy, wealth dummy, and literacy level dummy using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimation. We also argue against the problem of endogeneity.

A participant is defined as a person who has worked under the MGNREGS anytime in the past five years. The reason for such a time period being the idea that empowerment would be triggered with a lag and would improve with the passing of time.

A non-participant in this study is defined as a person who wishes to work under the MGNREGS but has been unable to due to either family restrictions or non-provision of work by the authorities.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a multi-faceted concept. According to the World Bank, Empowerment is the process of increasing capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. This definition is in line with Sen's 'capability approach' to welfare where the main focus is on what one is capable of doing/achieving. Our attempt to measure empowerment is also in line with this concept. Through the measurement of household autonomy and mobility level, we are able to capture the real aspect of empowerment in a woman's life. These are directly meaningful for her as they focus on what is actually happening with her, irrespective of her thinking and attitudes. However, ignoring the attitudes completely would be unfair as the first step to

⁷ Source: NFHS 3; Rao, M. Babu PhD Questionnaire on Self Help Groups and Empowerment of Women, A Case Study in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh; Women's Empowerment Report 2009-10, Auroville Village Action Group, Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu

empowerment is one's thoughts because consciously or sub-consciously, one only does what one believes in his mind is to be done.

The Household Autonomy questions are based on the position of the woman in the household and her decision making ability/powers within the household. The Mobility questions measures a woman's freedom to move about freely as per her choice, which is a fundamental right of every human. Social Attitudes measure a woman's attitude regarding social issues which may not directly relate to her life but which she as a part of the society may have encountered or may encounter in the future. These questions are important in that they reflect the choices of society and in a sense contribute to the society's empowerment. Personal Attitudes focus on the attitude of a woman in her personal life, including issues or dilemmas that she may be facing as a part of her daily routine. The attitudes are personal in the sense that they are bound to happen in her life if she is "normal" in the eyes of the society. Lastly, questions on domestic violence look at the empowerment in true sense of the word, especially so, because of the truthfulness and openness observed amongst the respondents regarding this. Where domestic violence becomes a part of daily routine, achieving absolute empowerment is still a distant dream.

	Household Autonomy	Mobility	Social Attitude	Personal Attitude	Domestic Violence
Household Autonomy	1.0000				
Mobility	0.0878	1.0000			
Social Attitude	0.3974***	0.1925**	1.0000		
Personal Attitude	0.3842***	0.0594	0.1673*	1.0000	
Domestic Violence	0.3056***	0.1632	0.1041	0.2185**	1.0000

Table 1 * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Whether these four aspects that we are measuring are related to each other or not can be checked by looking at the pairwise correlation between these. We see that all of them to some extent are positively correlated with each other. Significant pairwise correlation coefficients are observed for household autonomy and personal attitude. The extent of correlation is 0.38. Again, between household autonomy and social attitude we see a correlation of 0.40. Mobility and social attitude has a correlation coefficient of 0.19. There is a positive correlation between domestic violence and personal attitude and household autonomy, as one may expect.

Data

The household survey was carried out mainly in the block Sidhauri of district Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh. This block is the closest to Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh. Sitapur has 19 blocks and 1329 gram panchayats. For some variation, the same survey was conducted in

another block namely, Mishrik, albeit at a much smaller scale. It was recognised during the survey that within a village there was little variation among the women. So, we aimed at maximising the number of villages surveyed. Around 16 villages surveyed across a span of 15 days had people who were willing to respond and fit our criterion.

The data has been collected for 78 participants out of which 13 are widows and 41 non-participants out of which 5 are widows. The data is summarised below in Table 1. A very important pattern that emerges from this summary is that out of all participants that we surveyed, none of them have higher than primary education while several non-participants are literates implying that mainly illiterates work under this scheme.

Type	Participants	Non-Participants
Hindus	70	39
Muslims	8	2
Widows	13	5
Literates (Primary)	12	7
Literates (High school and above)	0	7
Land Size (0-5 Bigah)	93	26
Land Size (greater or equal to 5 Bigah)	7	12
Total Number	78	41

Table 2

It is to be noted that the low participation rate in the state was quite apparent as we could find only 6-7 women participants on an average in one village; and in the villages where we did find better participation, it was extremely difficult to find non-participants. This may be attributed to the fact that our chosen block was very close to the city. But, we believe this argument to be weak on the basis of our experience of finding women refusing to work and earn money despite living in conditions of dire poverty.

Experience from the Field

During the survey, we observed that villages which had worked under MGNREGS were on the whole more empowered than villages which had not, suggesting spill over effects of the scheme. In particular, we found that in a village called Dharava where many people had heard about the scheme and participated, women were much more empowered as compared to women of a neighbouring village called Kakhara where there was absolutely no awareness about works done under MGNREGS. Many people lived in pucca houses here and all the women rushed inside when they saw us approaching them. When we tried to make a general conversation with the women, they simply refused to talk. We found only one non-

participant here and even though she was reluctant to talk to us at first, she agreed when her husband encouraged her to do so.

During the survey, we felt that positive responses were equally probable for a non-participant as for a participant as there was no uniform notable difference. We found that working under the scheme has affected beliefs and thinking vastly of only a few people, generally but not exclusively those who have been a part of it for long enough; and even some of those who have been a part of it since the beginning have not been affected much or, they have been but fail to recognise it. We gauge this by asking the respondents whether they feel any change after having been a part of the scheme. If true, a reason for this could be that the kind of beliefs that our study analyses are ingrained in a woman's mind since childhood and thinking that an unstable scheme such as MGNREGS can affect those thoughts is extremely ambitious. One would expect to see such a change only in places where the scheme has been persistent for some time. However, we have some reason to believe that the scheme is affecting the people in ways that they do not even realise. The change starts with more money coming into the house which can lead to two things. One, except in certain cases, working women command more respect. Two, women working under MGNREGS are financially stronger than non-participants. This can be seen from the fact that all the participants that we surveyed managed their own money earned from working under MGNREGS and when not working under MGNREGS, all but one participant got sufficient money from the household money for personal expenses. Of the non-participants, all but 6 could get money for personal expenditure from whoever managed the family resources (Figure 1). We believe that as one becomes financially stronger, they become more capable of introspecting and changing their belief system. So, ruling out positive effects of the scheme in our opinion would be a grave mistake. This tells us that there may be a cyclical relationship between empowerment and participation under MGNREGS; one feeds into the other. We will discuss this further in the following section as we rule out the potential endogeneity problem.

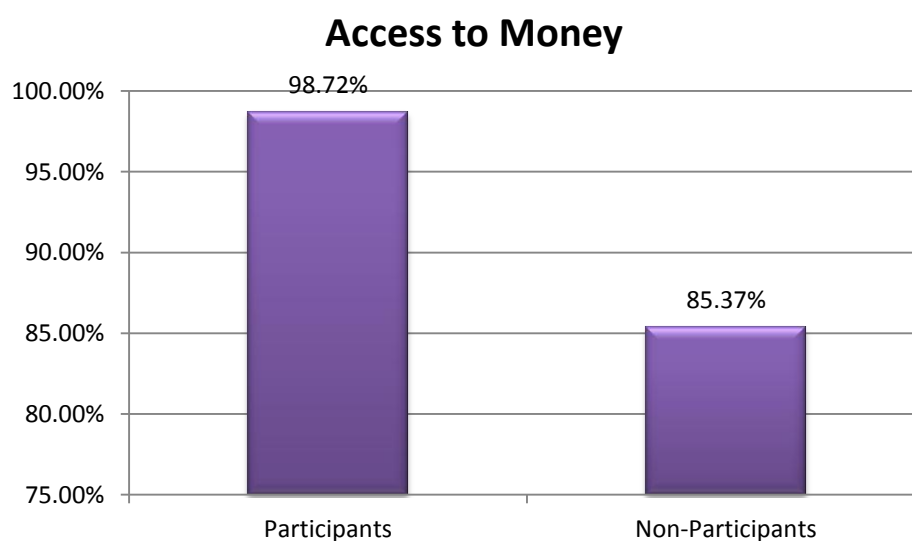


Figure 1

The MGNREGS is a demand driven scheme, albeit on paper. A stark reality is that in the villages that we studied, it is majorly a Pradhan driven scheme. Here, supply creates its own demand. The Rozgar Divas which is meant for noting down the demand for work and making job cards is just a virtual phenomenon. The Pradhan decides who gets work and when they get work. In some instances nobody gets any work but there is still marking of the attendance and outflow of money from government's side into these corrupt people's bank accounts. The villagers act as partners in crime as we found many instances of fake muster roll entries and people of certain castes getting all the work (vote banks).

The benefits of the scheme maybe restricted to a small group of people in a village with active MGNREGS participation but these small positive effects at the micro level join in to show positive effects at the macro level. That situation, however, is still a distant dream, given the low rates of participation and awareness.

There were a range of questions that we asked in order to understand various aspects of the life of rural women and whether our units of measurement were relevant for them or not. We got very mixed responses. While some of the women were so full of self-respect that in addition to answering many questions in the positive, they protected us from the naysayers who at times became quite disrespectful and addicts who were on the verge of being aggressive, there were others who were so dejected from their lives that they wanted to leave everything and come with us to the city where they can live respectfully.

Among the women of Sidhali (as our survey was focussed to this block), there are a lot of contrasting notions about participation under MGNREGS. While some women are proud of the fact that they work and earn for their family, others find it disrespectful that women and men of different castes work together. Lifting mud and bricks is demeaning for most of them, so much so that they are willing to spend their lives in excruciating poverty than to step outside the home to work. This false sense of respect is greater in people of higher castes and those who are relatively richer than some of our poorest respondents. Only 28 out of a total 78 participants felt that women's true place is not only in the home as against 18 out of 41 non-participants (Figure 2). This maybe because non-participants are comprised of more number of literates than the participants and having liberal thoughts is a direct consequence of education.

Proportion who believe that a woman's true place is not only in the home

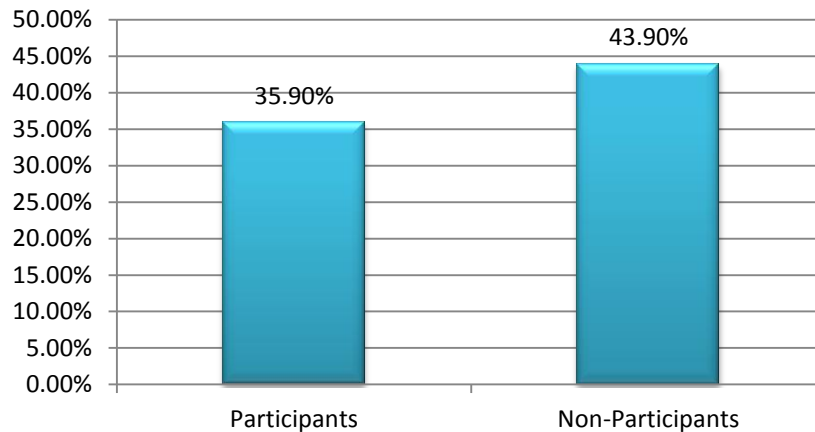


Figure 2

However, once a women started working we found most of them to be satisfied with the functioning of the scheme and the reasons why people stopped working included illness causing inability to work, pending wages, apathetic attitude of the Gram Pradhan leading to less or no availability of work for them, absence of crèche facility, etc. Many women felt that working under MGNREGS gives them a chance to meet other people and gain knowledge about things that they wouldn't know of sitting at their homes.

Further, there is a lot of gender and caste bias when it comes to people selection by the Pradhan to work under MGNREGS. For example, the Pradhan of Jansapur was accused of having taken away the job cards of some of the families and not giving them work; the Pradhan of Dharava is biased against women and does not provide them with any work. In many villages people complained about the Pradhan favouring those who voted for him and completely ignoring the others. In one instance, we heard of a Pradhan interacting with villagers from a distance for the fear of being "polluted". In general, it was the case that a Pradhan of Yadav caste was favouring Yadavs and Muslims as they are the vote banks of state's ruling polity.

Domestic Violence

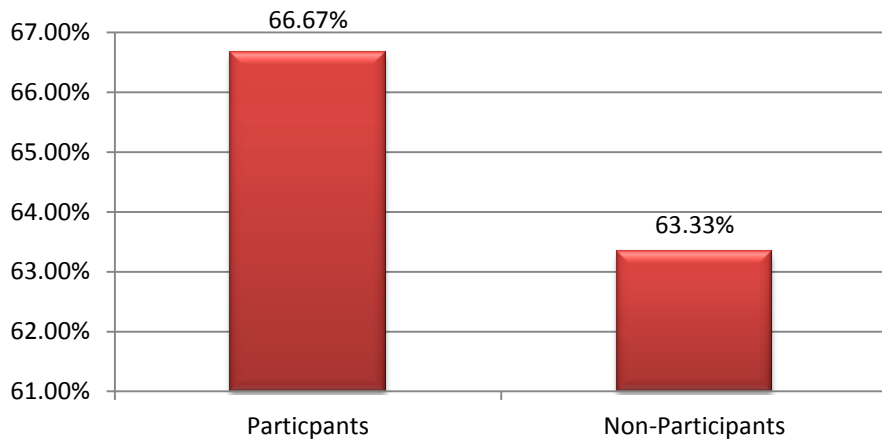


Figure 3

Next, we found that in every village that we visited, domestic violence was a routine business. Figure 3 summarises the proportion of women that faced domestic violence. This is not to say, however, that every woman that we surveyed was hit. Barring a few, almost all women surveyed viewed men as next to god and thought it to be their right to suppress women and hit them as they like. They felt their duty to give in to the whims and fancies of the menfolk of the house, even if unjustified. Only 19 participants and 9 non-participants felt that it was justified for a woman to leave her husband (Figure 4) if subjected to extreme torture by him. Most of the women believed it to be their duty to serve their husbands and children food and then eat the leftovers and in case of shortage, even going hungry. Only 15 out of the 40 non-participants and 23 out of 74 participants who were asked this question believed that it was not their duty to eat after their family had been fed (Figure 5).

Proportion who believe it is okay to leave husband if regularly abused

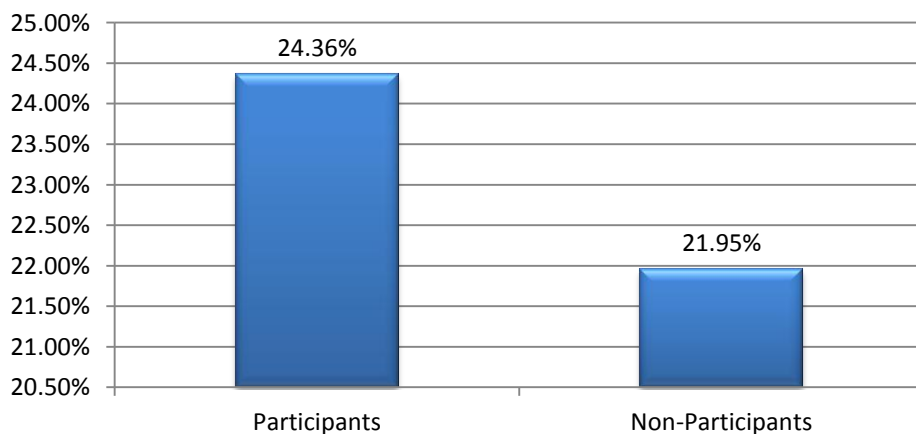


Figure 4

Proportion who believe it was not their duty to eat after their family had been fed

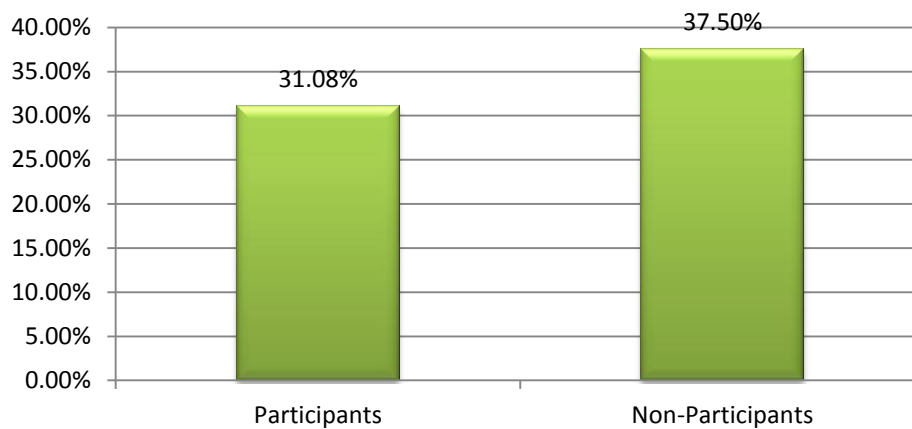


Figure 5

A general picture of the state of women was apparent from their demeanour as they sat on the floor in front of the menfolk and looked away from their father-in-law and brothers-in-law. We did not find any case of oppression of mothers-in-law as is generally expected and in some cases the mother-in-law even sat on the floor while the respondent sat on the charpoy with us. She did not mind being shunned by anybody.

One important question that we asked during the survey was “Does a woman have the right to demand equal share of inheritance?”. There are deep and conflicting ideas behind the answer to this for various reasons. One, the people that we surveyed were mostly very poor with little landholding and wealth. Two, the traditional dowry system is still quite believed and the extortion system of today is still a new concept (was not prevalent at the time most of our respondents got married as almost all of them got only utensils in dowry rather than expensive items). So, when they said that a woman must not have a share in inheritance after marriage, it almost seemed justified to us. They reasoned that if apart from the dowry the girl is also given a share in landholding (prime inheritance) then, it would be more difficult for the males at home to source their livelihood since most people are extremely poor. However, there was a positive aspect in some responses in that they believed that as long as a woman is unmarried or divorced, she has equal share in the household wealth. Unfortunately, this was not an extremely prevalent belief and in many cases people still believed in girls being *paraya dhan*.

When we asked our respondents whether in their view working women had more of a voice in the village the answers that we got are summarised in Figure 6. This points to another problem prevalent in the villages, that is, only the influential and the wealthy have a say in decision making and this is not limited to women only.

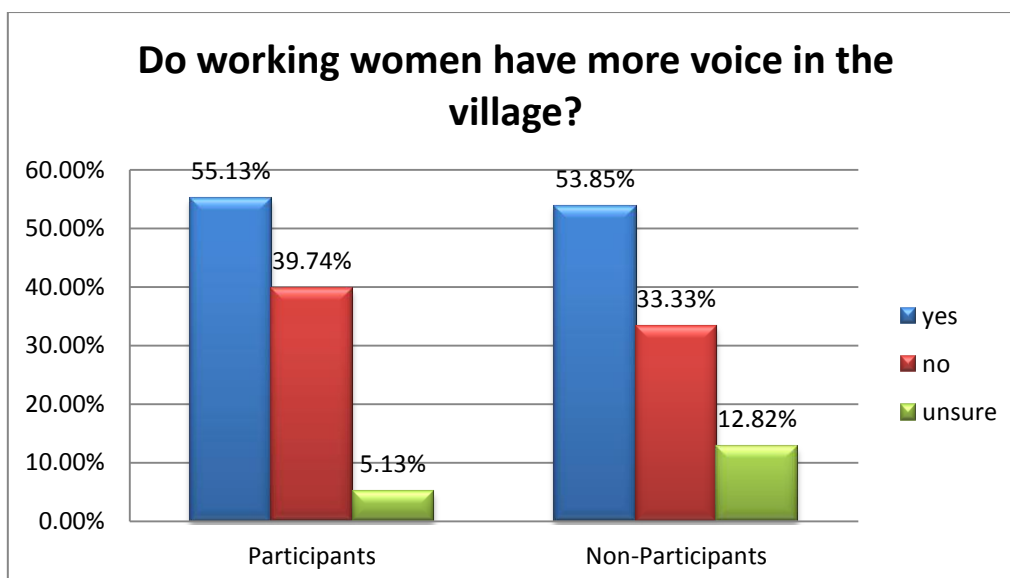


Figure 6

An important part of our field experience was our discussions with the Chief Development Officer (CDO) of Sitapur, Mr. Bal Krishna, the Block Development Officer (BDO) of Sidhauri, Mr K.K. Singh and the head of the NGO Sangatin Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (SKMS) (Sangatin meaning companion), Ms. Richa Singh. She has worked for the welfare of poor in Sitapur for more than fifteen years. One of the recent initiatives of the NGO included organisation of '*kaam mango abhiyan*' under the aegis of which job cards were made for all those who desired, awareness about the scheme was spread and people were encouraged to be a part of the scheme.

Mr. Tripathi told us about the main focus of the scheme which is to provide employment to the rural poor and the limited potential in the scheme for asset building. Work is given to individuals, which ultimately fails to actually build assets. For example, a canal dug out this winter would ultimately be destroyed next monsoon but still it is sanctioned to be built to provide employment. The works sanctioned under this scheme are required to have a 60:40 labour to material ratio as the focus is the provision of employment in line with Keynes's 'make work' theory⁸. The current government wishes to focus more on asset creation as is economically more viable and for that it is expected that this ratio would be altered in favour of more material than labour.

According to him, the entire scheme is demand driven in the sense that each gram panchayat has the responsibility of creating a monthly budget. This includes the number of people who are seeking job and the kind of infrastructure the village needs, such as wells, *kachha* roads, etc. This is forwarded to the block and after accumulating all village budgets, it is sent to the district level office. Accordingly, funds are dispersed. Further, all transactions happen electronically, so is no scope of funds going missing in transition. Due to the electronic nature of the monetary transfer, payments are at most delayed by 15 days.

⁸ "The government should pay people to dig holes in the ground and then fill them up."- J.M. Keynes, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money

According to Mr K.K. Singh, women are in a way paid more than men because of the manner in which work is divided. For instance, women have to dig 56 cubic feet of well in order to get paid as against 70 cubic feet required to be dug by men. The crèche facility is ineffective because according to him the culture of the villages does not permit women to take their children to the worksites and hence, is not provided for. He also told us about a MGNREGS helpline number where complaints can be lodged relating to various matters such as non-payment of wages, non-availability of work, etc. He also told us about a forum where one could complaint about the Gram Pradhan, the Tehsil Divas. However, when we asked our respondents about these forums we found that very few people knew about them and some of them who had tried registering a complaint at the Tehsil Divas told us about the corruption at the lowest level clerks which prevented contact between them and the officers.

Ms. Richa Singh, on the other hand, had a different story to tell. She could not recall any instance of a woman getting a job without having to fight for it. She strongly condemns the system of payment because people do not get paid despite the electronic system of Funds Transfer Order (FTO). There is no follow-up with payment or job availability. She questions the process of payment as every individual has their name and job card details enlisted, yet some get paid and some do not. Account numbers in some cases are erroneous. Some of these errors are truly a mistake but others according to her are done purposefully. "The biggest problem is corruption!" she says. Many a times internet information does not tally with the actual data because of lack of technical skills of the government officials and corruption, which is true as we ourselves found out. She also narrated incidents where muster roll of many people were clubbed to show completion of more than 100 days of work.

In the context of low women participation in Sidhauri, she told us that participation, especially by the women folk depends a lot on the presence of canals nearby, as desilting of canals is not very physically demanding. Also, Sidhauri is very close to Lucknow. So, people could easily afford to travel to the city in order to get better paid jobs than stay and do NREGA work. However, we did not find many instances of people travelling to the city for work during the course of our study. She also mentions transportation as another issue. Women are given a 10percent allowance if the work is not provided within 5 kilometres of the village. However, this 10 percent is constant and the same amount is paid whether a woman has to travel 6 kilometres or 36 kilometres. These in addition to culture and traditions of a region are some of the factors which dissuade women to work under this scheme. For instance, in western Uttar Pradesh, women participation is even lower because of the history of that region.

Regression Analysis

In order to identify the effects of women participation on household autonomy, mobility, social and personal attitude, we study the following model. We regress each of the aforementioned indices on MGNREGS participation dummy, land dummy (as a proxy of wealth), religion dummy, literacy dummy, and marital status dummy. This analysis is represented in the following table.

Dependent Variable	Household Autonomy	Mobility	Social Attitudes	Personal Attitudes
participant	1.28 [0.50]**	-0.53 [0.66]	0.63 [0.41]	0.74 [0.37]**
religion	0.93 [0.80]	-1.30 [1.06]	0.41 [0.65]	0.82 [0.58]
marital	-0.70 [0.61]	3.93 [0.81]***	0.81 [0.50]	-0.09 [0.45]
land	0.27 [0.62]	0.24 [0.82]	-0.06 [0.50]	0.68 [0.45]
Ob.literacy	0.00 [0.00]	0.00 [0.00]	0.00 [0.00]	0.00 [0.00]
1.literacy	1.10 [0.59]*	-1.97 [0.79]**	0.16 [0.49]	0.14 [0.44]
2.literacy	1.44 [0.99]	0.85 [1.31]	2.36 [0.81]***	1.68 [0.73]**
_cons	5.37 [0.48]***	3.72 [0.63]***	5.10 [0.39]***	5.75 [0.35]***
F statistic	2.12	5.77	1.84	1.70
Adjusted R-squared	0.05	0.20	0.04	0.03
No. of Observations	119	119	119	119

Table 3

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

1. Participant = 0 if not participated in MGNREGS
= 1 if participated in MGNREGS
2. Literacy = 0 if illiterate
= 1 if up till and including primary
= 2 if high school and above
3. Marital Status = 0 if married
= 1 if widowed
4. Religion = 0 if Hindu
= 1 if Muslim
5. Land = 0 if 0-5 Bigah
= 1 if 5 Bigah and above
6. Occupation = 0 if housewife (including household animals' feeding)
= 1 if works outside the home

Note that, the coefficient of Participant and Literacy is positive and significant in case of household autonomy. This says that a Participant has on an average more household autonomy than a non-participant, ceteris paribus. Specifically, a participant's household autonomy index is 1.28 units higher than that of a non-participant. Also, a primary educated woman, keeping participation and all other things constant, has on an average more household autonomy than an illiterate woman and has an index which is 1.10 units higher than that of a non-participant and is significant at the 10 percent level.

Moving onto mobility, we see that marital status and literacy dummies yield a significant result. A married woman scores more on the mobility index than an unmarried woman. In fact she scores 3.93 units more than an unmarried woman. The literacy dummy yields a negative impact of literacy on mobility. An illiterate woman scores more on this index by 1.97 units. This anomaly can be explained if we consider that only rich households send their daughters to school and restrictions on richer and comparatively well-off households are more than relatively poorer households

Considering social attitude, we see that literacy dummy is the only variable that significantly affects social attitude. The direction of the impact is also positive, as it is expected to be. With more education, a woman would have positive social attitudes than otherwise. Literate women score higher than illiterate women by 2.36 units.

Lastly, we look into personal attitudes. Here, we see that the participation dummy significantly affects the index. Participants score 0.74 units more than non-participants when it comes to personal attitude. And, literate women score 1.68 units more than illiterate women. However, this is an extremely imprecise specification as the overall F-statistic is not significant. Also, as seen from the value of adjusted R-squared this model is not a good fit.

Most importantly, we note that the adjusted R-squared value is extremely low for each of the regressions (except maybe the second) and that there may be grave problems in the analysis. So, any interpretations based on these must be viewed with scepticism.

One potential problem with our analysis is the problem of endogeneity as the relationship between any of these indices and MGNREGS participation may not be one way. However, we argue on the basis of our field experience that the prime reason to work was money and this was uniform across all the participants. Working for the sake of self-respect and independence does not seem to be an aspect of the rural class. Out of all the participants that we interviewed, all but one said that money was their prime objective behind working. Thus, we believe that it is not the case that empowerment of a woman is leading her to work outside the home.

Summary

We conclude that MGNREGS has led to women empowerment but in less obvious ways. The positive effects are not uniform across the participants and our regression results indicate that participation positively affects only the household autonomy of a woman. Also, it is to be recognised that there are important spill-over effects in terms of awareness and empowerment from participants to the non-participants in any particular village. This means that if the participation in the state were not so poor, the women would definitely be in much better conditions. It is imperative to note that this empowerment cannot be attributed solely to MGNREGS. A number of factors including culture and traditions play an important role. For example, nuclear families are the trend of villages and that also contributes to a woman's empowerment in a number of ways.

Next, we note that MGNREGS far from being a demand driven scheme is actually a Pradhan driven scheme in Sitapur. This has grave consequences for the participants and the potential participants. This is one of the major determinants of the pattern of participation under MGNREGS. Those women who form an important part of the vote bank of Pradhan or the political party to which he is affiliated, are the ones who have an option of working and generally, we observed only them to be working. Apart from this, caste is an important factor as all our respondents but one comprised only of SC, ST, and OBCs and we found adequately that it was a strict no for Brahmin women to work outside of home no matter

how poor they are. Also, we found that some of the villages were completely ignored for work under MGNREGS for unknown reasons.

The need of the hour, thus, is a restructuring of the organisation of the scheme which lowers the autonomy of the officials and rules out the possibility of any direct interpersonal relationships between the officials and the applicants of the scheme. There should be a renewed focus on the types of works undertaken and a strict monitoring system should be put in place which also takes care of the provision of facilities that are to be provided under the Act.

Lastly, we recognise that empowerment is a lifelong concept and spending a few hours with rural women cannot give us an adequate idea about their lives and their concept of empowerment. But, we feel that the purpose of study which was to check whether MGNREGS is or can be a potential determinant of empowerment has been fulfilled. These findings make policy building even more relevant for the entire country. This is because if the state with lowest participation rate could exhibit positive effects of the scheme then the states which are better off in terms of participation will definitely be observing them too.

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Appendix

Notable Case Studies

Kaushalya, an upper caste Hindu non participant from the village of Naoakhera, Sidhuli, Sitapur had approached the Gram Pradhan to ask for work under the MGNREGS but requested him to provide her with less physically demanding work as compared to lifting mud or bricks, since she had undergone three major operations in the recent past. Despite being relatively well educated (intermediate), she did not mind getting involved in the unskilled activities provided under the scheme since she was in the need of money and also had the desire to move out of the four walls of home to gain awareness and to socialise. However, the Pradhan refused to accede to her request, saying he wouldn't want to get involved in any kind of unequal treatment. Disappointed, she had to look for work elsewhere and was soon afterwards hired as an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Bahu and now works for the Health Ministry. Her work includes spreading awareness, taking women for operations(s) and children for vaccinations, thus, contributing to the improvements in health and awareness of women and children both. The smile on her face and the glitter in her eyes showed how passionate she was about her work. As a result of

her choice to not only be a housewife and move out to work, she told us that there was a tremendous increase in her level of general awareness. She felt so happy to be able to recognise all the routes around her village and also to be contributing equally to the family income. The whole family, including her, is happier now, she claims.

Having acquired a great deal of confidence along with realisation of self-worth, she now holds meetings involving only women, in various villages every month to discuss with them their problems including domestic violence, other domestic issues, awareness issues, current affairs and other initiatives that might help them in their empowerment. She told us a great deal about how working outside (unlike many women) among other men and women earned her great respect and most importantly, self-satisfaction. She now feels empowered enough to motivate other women to work as well. The questions that we asked her in order to judge the level of her empowerment confirmed the same. Her answers, unlike most women revealed her positively changed thinking and she revealed to us the extent to which working outside can affect a rural woman's life. All (except one) questions that we asked her fetched the ideal answer, hence, getting her the highest scores (among all the women surveyed). She also told us that she is still interested in working under MGNREGS, provided that the nature of work is more balanced, which she says is the major reason for non-participation of many women among other reasons like the irregularity of work for women, delay in payment and favouritism on the part of the authorities including the Pradhan.

Naoakhera was one of the best villages that we came across in our entire experience. People, here were extremely polite and forthcoming. Majority of people here were Muslims and had to leave in the middle of the interview to end their fast as we went during Ramadan. But, we were touched by their kindness when they immediately came back to finish the interviews. They chose to talk to us even though they had been fasting the entire day. Irrespective of their empowerment quotient, this speaks volumes about their nature and attitude.

We also surveyed a Mate who is appointed by the Pradhan and is responsible to inform and bring women to work site while the work is in progress. The presence of those women on the field guarantees her per day attendance and consequently, wage payment.

Sudevi, a Hindu Rawat is a mate of village Devipur under the Revankala Panchayat in the Sidhauri block of Sitapur. After making us sit in chairs (unlike the usual charpoy) and while offering us snacks and cold water she recalls how glad she is to have made the decision to work under the scheme. When in need of money, she started like every other woman, by the difficult task of convincing the male folk to allow her to go out to work. It is still embedded in their social system that a 'good' woman is one who listens to her husband and doesn't go out to work. After crossing that hurdle she went out to work whenever it came up and in the process got to learn a lot more than she would otherwise have had the opportunity to. She showed her job card to us and was proud about the fact that she was among the few women who began working since the first phase of NREGA, that is, seven years ago. She believes that in addition to supplementing income of the house, she has acquired a lot of knowledge. Even the elders in her family who were initially apprehensive

about the idea of her stepping outside the safe walls and going to work, are now happy. She cheerfully tells us about how her sincerity and dedication won the trust of the Pradhan, who in turn has recently appointed her as the Mate and entrusted her with a responsibility to inform and bring along several women to work at the work site. She herself invited her father-in-law to sit along as we proceeded with our questions and answered them without any discomfort and hesitancy, which was a rare scenario during our course of study. Women generally increased the length of their veil in the presence of male folk and especially, did not sit at the same level as their father-in-law, which clearly wasn't the case with Sudevi. Women also felt shy or uncomfortable when talking to strangers like us but Sudevi herself sent her son running to invite us to talk to her. She was happy to receive us and wanted to continue talking about how working under NREGA helped her in so many ways and especially improve the financial condition at home, and therefore also politely asked us to stay for dinner.

Shivkali, a Hindu Yadav non-participant from the village of Rasalwa, Sidhauri, Sitapur claimed to have demanded work but the gram Pradhan was not forthcoming, she said. She seemed quite convinced about the fact that a woman's status was much lower in comparison to a man's and that there are well defined roles for a 'nice' woman which every woman should conform to. Therefore, if not in dire need for money she would never prefer to go to work. While adjusting her veil and making herself comfortable on the same charpoy as us, and with the other women positioned around us, she openly admitted that she doesn't even consider her daughter as her own. This came as quite a shock to us and we wondered how her daughter, who shyly stood in a corner, must have felt. Hiding our discomfort, we continued with our questions. That miserable look at the daughter's face is still hard to forget. Shivkali reiterated that it wasn't right for a respectable woman to go out and work. Working outside could only have negative effects, she said. She also believed that a woman has no say at all in the household decision making and it is her duty to obey everything a man said. Further, even though she said it was okay to ask a husband for help in the household work if in need, but she herself had never done that. After she expressed her thoughts on how an ideal woman should never express her opinion in her own home and always ask for permission every time she steps out of her home, we felt sure that our questions were good enough to gauge her backwardness. She however, did not have a problem with the dress worn by a woman as long as she was adequately covered. When asked about eve teasing, she tapped one of our hands and exclaimed quite firmly that it is definitely the girl's fault. Even domestic violence didn't seem to bother her much because she herself showed us marks on her arms of a recent thrashing she received. This talks about the extent of freedom of thoughts as well as actions enjoyed by non-participants in some of the villages.

Construction of the five indices:

1. Household Autonomy

1. Can you give your opinion freely to your husband when a decision needs to be made regarding the household?

Always (1) Usually (1) Occasionally (0.5) No (0)

2. Can you give your opinion freely to your husband's family when a decision needs to be made regarding the household?
Always (1) Usually (1) Occasionally (0.5) No (0)
3. Who decides what and how much the domestic expenditures (like food, vessels, clothes) are?
(Mostly) Me (1) (mostly) Husband (0) Both equally (1) (mostly) Husband's Family (0)
4. How much say do you have in making large purchases like a plot of land?
Make final decision (1) Equal share in final decision (1) Have some input in decision (0.5) No input in decision (0)
5. How much say do (did) you have in whether your children will go (went) to school?
Made final decision (1) Equal share in final decision (1) Had some input in decision (0.5) No input in decision (0)
6. How much say do (did) you have in how many children you and your husband have?
Made final decision (1) Equal share in final decision (1) Had some input in decision (0.5) No input in decision (0)
7. Do you ever ask your husband for help with the household and/or children?
Yes (1) No (0)
8. Do you serve your husband and children their food and then eat when they are finished? Yes, always (0) (Go to 41) Sometimes/Usually (0.5) (Go to 41) No, we eat together (1) (Go to 42) No, I eat first (1) (Go to 42)
9. If you eat after, do you eat only what's left over or do keep some food for yourself?
Leftovers (0) Keep (1)
10. If there is a food shortage, will you go without food so that your husband can eat?
Yes (0) Sometimes (0.5) No (1)

3. Mobility

1. When you go out to some place within your village, do you need permission from your husband/family, or do you simply need to inform them of where you are going (because they will let you)?
Permission (0) Inform (1) Neither (1)
2. If your husband or his family, without a good reason, does not allow you to go out, do you attempt to discuss it or convince them that you should be allowed to?
Yes (1) No (0) Sometimes (0.5)
3. Do you need permission to go to NREGS or do you simply inform?
Permission (0) Inform (1) Neither (1)
4. Do you need permission to go to your parent's house or do you simply inform?
Permission (0) Inform (1) Neither (1)
5. Do you need permission to go to your friends' house or do you simply inform?
Permission (0) Inform (1) Neither (1)

4. Attitudes: Social Issues

1. What should a woman do if her husband abuses her on a regular basis?
Put up with it (0) Try to correct him (0.5) Leave him (1)

a. Other _____
mark accordingly

2. Can a woman leave her husband if he abuses her?
Yes (1) Sometimes (0.5) No (0) Unsure (0)
3. Is it her fate to be abused?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0)
4. Is it more important for boys to be educated than girls?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0)
5. Do you believe boy children should be valued and preferred more than girl children?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0)
6. If a girl has a good job, like a teacher or doctor, who should decide whether she continues her career after she marries?
Woman only (1) Husband/family only (0) Both together (1) Unsure (0)
7. Do you believe dowry-giving is necessary to ensure a happily married life for the girl?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0)
8. When faced with a dowry demand, is it ok to say no?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0)
9. Do you think all women should be equal regardless of caste?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0)
10. Do you believe there is ever justification for caste/religion-violence?
Yes (1) No (0) Sometimes (0)
11. Do you think boys and men need to be gender sensitized?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0)
12. What do you think about eve-teasing? Whose fault is it? Note the attitude. Give options for this question.
13. If a girl is sexually abused in your community, what should happen? Whose fault is it? Give options. Note the attitude.

5. Attitudes: Personal Life

1. Do you think a woman should have a say in how many children she has?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0)
2. Do you think a woman has the right to demand an equal share of her inheritance?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0)
3. Do you think a woman is as capable as a man is of managing money?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0)
4. Do you think a woman should decide how to use the money she acquires herself?
Yes (1) Sometimes (0.5) No (0) Unsure (0)
5. Do you think men should participate in the housework if the woman works outside the home?
Yes (1) (Go to 33a) No (0) (Go to 34) Unsure (0) (Go to 34)
6. If yes, should he participate equally?
Yes (1) No (0)

7. Do you think it is ok for a woman to ask for help from her husband if she feels she has too much housework to manage, even if she doesn't have an outside job?
Yes (1) No (0)
8. Do you believe that it's a wife's duty to serve her husband and children and eat separately, either before or after?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0.5)
9. In your own opinion, how valid is a woman's opinion compared to a man's?
Woman's more valid (0.5) Same (1) Men's more valid (0) Unsure (0)
10. "A woman's place is in the home". Do you agree with this statement?
Yes (0) No (1) Unsure (0)
11. Is a woman capable of looking after herself outside the home?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0) Sometimes (0.5) Only during the daytime (0.5)
12. Do you think a husband should inform his wife about where he is going and when he'll be back?
Yes (1) No (0) Unsure (0)

6. Domestic Violence

1. Have you ever been threatened by your partner? Yes(0) No(1)
2. Have you ever been threatened by your family members? Yes(0) No(1)
3. Have you ever been hit or injured by your partner? Yes(0) No(1)
4. Have you ever been hit or injured by your family members? Yes(0) No(1)