

Determinants of Household Decision Making Capacity of Women *Beedi* Workers: A Case Study of Tufanganj Subdivision of Koch Bihar District, West Bengal

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Abstract : *The ability of women to make decisions including their own health care, major household purchases, and family visits is an important component of their empowerment. But in developing and underdeveloped countries, the participation of women in any household decision is still fairly low. Particularly in marginalized societies, women's decision-making is restricted by patriarchal ideology and is determined by various socio-economic factors. Thus, the study examines the factors associated with household decision making capacity of women beedi workers in Tufanganj Subdivision of Koch Bihar district. Beedi workers are the most vulnerable people in society who hardly find their way of living by rolling beedi. The study is mainly based on primary data. 150 women beedi workers from different villages of Tufanganj Block - I have been selected for the study. Binary logistic regression was conducted to determine the factors associated with household decision making capacity of the respondents. The findings indicate that the decision making capacity of women beedi workers is associated with higher age, higher literacy rate and higher level of income. Hindu women have more probability of making decisions than non -Hindu women. Additionally, literacy status of the household head, family size, gender equitable attitude in family, and good relationship with family members lead to greater decision making power of women. Result also reveals that women who are more exposed to mass media are likely to have greater chances to participate in household decisions.*

Key words: *Decision making, Beedi worker, Socio-economic factors, Logistic regression.*

Introduction

Various studies show the fact that women significantly contribute to the development and growth of any country. However, their involvement in decision making is still low in many developing and undeveloped nations, largely because of cultural conservatism and infamous acts committed by their families and society as a whole (Pandey et al., 2021). Making a decision is considered as the most well-established indicator of women empowerment (Richardson, 2018). But women have consistently been denied the freedom to make their own decisions in their lives due to societal conventions (Kabeer, 1997). In order to comprehend women's position in a society, it

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is important to examine women's roles in both the public and domestic spheres (Mukhtar & Mukhtar, 1991). The ability of women to make decisions inside the family has been viewed as one of the key aspects that may have an impact on family's overall well-being (Thankian, 2020). The ability of women to make decisions, such as those involving their own health, major purchases for home and visiting relatives, is an important component of their empowerment (Seidu et al., 2020). But in our society, women generally have an inferior socio-economic position, which results in their exclusion from decision-making at all levels. Despite their low social standing, women's role is indispensable for household survival as well as the economic and social advancement of society (Kassa, 2015).

Many women remain dependent on their husbands and have no control over household spending on major purchases. They often have limited opportunities in making any household decisions. This paper, therefore, focuses on the women *beedi* workers (being part of the informal economy) and aims to determine their decision making capacities. Women *beedi* workers contribute to household income or in some cases are the only wage earners. Earning provides them the power to bargain and expands their decision-making capacities and capabilities. In this paper a detailed analysis of the various factors that influence the decision making capacity of women *beedi* workers has been discussed.

Overview of Beedi Workers

One of the most vulnerable groups of people working in informal sectors around the country and being unprotected by social security and the law are *beedi* workers. The employment is considered as a domain of female workers in the society, and provides livelihood opportunities to many women especially from the lower socio-economic group. Women of poor socio-economic background do *beedi* rolling sitting in their home along with all the household activities. The Govt of India (2001) estimated that there are 45 lakhs workers engaged in the *beedi* industry and amongst them 90 percent are home based women workers. As per the report of Standing Committee on Labour, there are 49.90 lakhs *beedi* workers in India of whom 18.29 lakhs belong to West Bengal (ILO, 2008). One of the main reasons for the *beedi* industry to flourish in West Bengal is the availability of cheap labour. Because of the increasing population, unemployment and poverty, the *beedi* industry appears to be an easy way of earning a wage to the lower class of people. The mode of employment of workers in this industry is entirely done through local contractors. However, the *beedi* industry is a large home-based industry and vulnerable people from low socio-economic backgrounds choose to work in the industry (Arora et al., 2020). Despite making a substantial contribution to the economy and society, they are frequently unnoticed and underpaid. Additionally, the workers are exposed to various sorts of exploitation, such as physical and sexual violence due to the absence of strong and universal laws. These make the *beedi* rolling a challenging occupation. Moreover, the recent pandemic has increased their pre-existing vulnerabilities by impacting the lives and livelihood of several *beedi* workers in India. The pandemic affects the workers, including wage reductions, non-payment of salaries during the lockdown period

and joblessness. In spite of these risks, *beedi* rolling has assisted a number of workers in achieving economic independence before and during the pandemic period.

Objective

The primary objective of the study is to find out the factors determining intra household decision making capacity of home based women *beedi* workers in Tufanganj Subdivision.

Data and Methodology

Study Area

Tufanganj Subdivision is a *special economic zone (SEZ)* of *beedi* industry in Koch Bihar district. As per Census 2011, the highest percentage of household industrial workers (34.85 percent) in the district is concentrated here and the major household industry in the subdivision is *beedi* rolling.

Tufanganj subdivision is the peripheral and under-developed region of Koch Bihar district which is located in the easternmost part of it. There are 2 blocks (Tufanganj I and II consisting of 25 gram panchayats) in Tufanganj Subdivision. The latitudinal and longitudinal extensions of the subdivision is 26°32' North and 89°67' East. The study area is bounded in the north by Alipurduar district, in the east by Assam, in the south by Dinhata subdivision and in west by Koch Bihar Sadar subdivision.

Sample Size and Data Collection

The study is mainly based on primary data collected from different villages of Tufanganj Block - I. Around 150 women *beedi* workers have been selected randomly from villages namely Sikarpur, Balarampur, Deocharai, Chilakhana, Maruganj, and Nakkatigach. Interviews were carried out to collect data about the social status, economic status and status of autonomy of women *beedi* workers through a structured schedule. Data was collected from July 2021 to September 2021.

Statistical Tool

Binary logistic regression has been used to find out the factors determining the decision making capacity of women *beedi* workers in the study area.

Dependent Variable

A question on who typically makes household decisions served as the basis for measuring the autonomy of women *beedi* workers. Respondents were questioned about four major areas of decision-making capacity. These include significant household purchases (which may include real estate, other assets etc.), purchases for basic household requirements, visits to relatives or the mother's home and self-care. There were five options for each question; the respondent, the

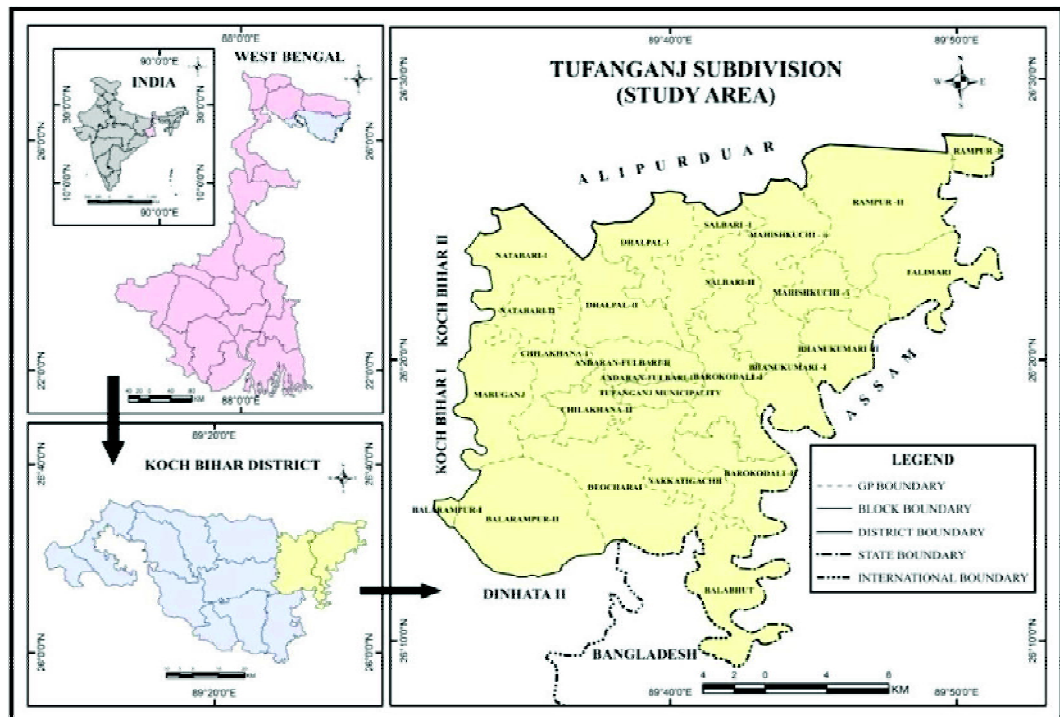


Fig.1. Location Map of the Study Area

Source: DIVA-GIS & Survey of India (2019)

respondent and her husband together, the respondent and another family member, the husband alone and someone else. To create a binary variable from the responses, the first 3 responses (where she can participate in taking decision) are given a value of 1, and 4th and 5th response (where she can not participate in taking decision) are given a value of 0. The values were then added together which ranges from 0 to 4. Finally, we classified the index value into ‘yes’ if the score is more than 0 and ‘no’ if the index value is 0 to generate the binary variable of women’s decision-making power.

Independent Variables

Different socio-demographic and economic characteristics of women *beedi* workers were considered as the independent variables. These include age of women, religion, educational level of respondent, literacy status of the household head, family size, level of monthly income of the respondent, wealth status, quality of relationship with family members, gender equitable attitude in family and media exposure. The following table shows the description of independent variables chosen for the study.

Table 1: Description of Independent Variables

Variables	Description
Age	Age has been categorised as <20years=1, 21-40 years=2, 41-60 years=3
Religion	Hindu=1, Non- Hindu=2
Educational Level of Respondent	Educational level has been categorised as- Illiterate=0, Primary=1, Secondary=2, Higher Secondary=3, above Higher Secondary (4)
Educational status of Household Head	It has been categorised as Illiterate=0, Literate=1.
Family Size	Small family (1-3 persons)=1, Moderate family (4-6 persons) =2, Large family(>6 persons)=3
Level of Monthly Income of Women <i>Beedi</i> Worker	Monthly income level has been categorised as <1500=1, 1500-3000=2, 3000-4500=3, >4500=4.
Wealth Status	Very Poor=1, Poor=2, Middle=3
Quality Relationship with Family Member	Good=1, Poor=2
Gender Equitable Attitude in Family	Gender equitable attitude=1, Gender inequitable attitude=2
Media Exposure	Exposed=1, Not Exposed=2

Source: Prepared by the researcher

Analysis and Discussion

Social-Economic Status of Women Beedi Workers in the Study Area

Age: The average age of women *beedi* workers in the study area lies between 21–40 years. The data shows that 18 percent respondents belong to less than 20 years of age, 44.67 percent respondents belong to 21-40 years and 37.33 percent belong to 41 – 60 years age group. Data shows that a significant proportion of workers are from less than 20 years of age. It depicts that the younger aged women are intended to roll *beedi* at an early age.

Caste Composition: Caste is a fixed social group in which an individual is born within a particular system of social stratification. The caste composition of women *beedi* workers in the study area reveals that 34.67 percent respondents are from the OBC (Other backward classes) category followed by 28.67 percent from SC (Scheduled Caste) category, 20 percent respondents from General category and 16.66 percent respondents from ST (Scheduled Tribe) community. It depicts that the majority of the women *beedi* workers in the study area belong to the OBC category.

Religion: It is evident that the majority of the respondents are Hindu (58 percent) followed by Muslim (32 percent).

Literacy Rate: The literacy profile of the workers shows that 11.67 percent respondents do not have any education at all, 30.33 percent have completed primary, 28.67 percent have completed secondary, 16.67 percent have completed secondary and only 12.67 percent have completed above higher secondary level of education. This may be one of the primary reasons for the plight of women *beedi* workers in the study area as the manufacturers or contractors take advantage of their ignorance.

Marital Status: Marital status of the women *beedi* workers in study area shows that 43.33 percent workers are married followed by 24.33 percent widows. It is found that 20.34 percent workers are unmarried and 12 percent workers are separated or divorced.

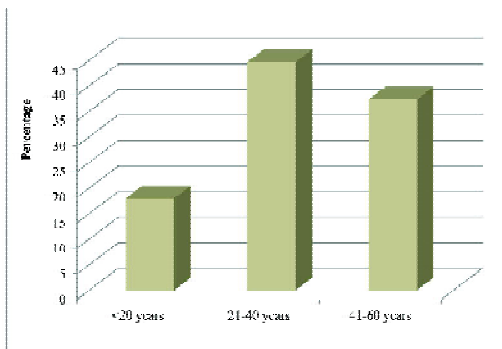


Fig 2. Age Structure of *Beedi* Workers

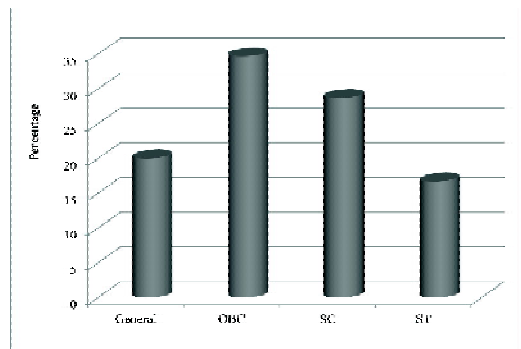


Fig 3. Caste Composition of *Beedi* Workers

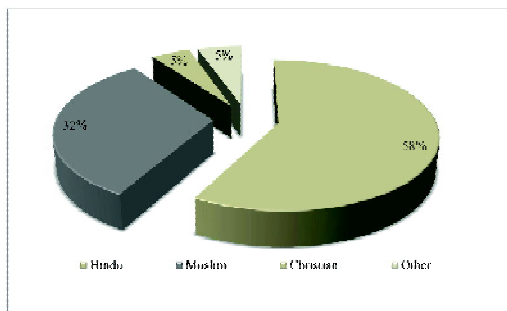


Fig 4. Religious Structure of *Beedi* Workers

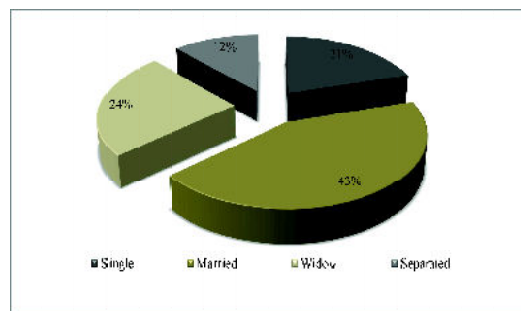


Fig 5. Marital Status of *Beedi* Workers

Economic Profile of the Respondents

Wage Rate: The nationally accepted wage rate for rolling 1000 *beedis* is Rs 169/- but in West Bengal representatives of the Labour Commissioner, Government of West Bengal,

representatives of the *Beedi* Merchants' Association (BMA) and trade union leaders restricted it to Rs. 126/- per 1000 *beedis*. In the study area, variation in wage rate creates many problems among the *beedi* rollers. In urban and semi-urban areas they get 115-120/- rupees for 1000 *beedi* rolls but in rural areas workers get only Rs. 105-110/- for 1000 *beedi* rolls. This is due to the presence of a middleman who supplies the raw materials to the workers. Data shows that 44.67 percent respondents get Rs. 120-140/- for rolling 1000 *beedis* whereas only 23.33 percent get more than Rs-140/-. It is noted that 32 percent respondents are the most deprived who get less than Rs-120/- wage rate for rolling 1000 *beedis* in the study area.

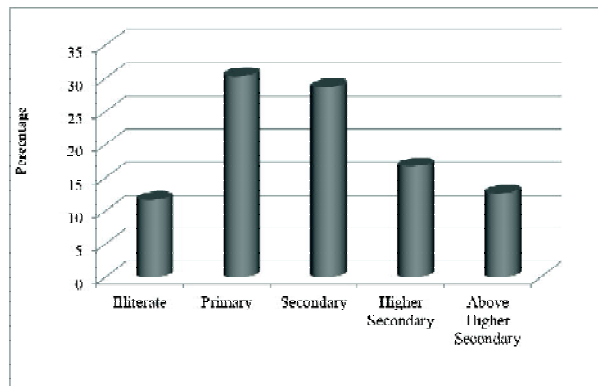


Fig 6. Educational Level of *Beedi* Workers

Monthly Income: Economic profile of the respondents reveals that the monthly income of women *beedi* workers through *beedi* rolling is very low. Around 38.67 percent respondents' monthly income is Rs. 1500-3000/-, 26.67 percent respondents' monthly income is Rs. 3000-4500/- and only 16.67 percent respondents' monthly income exceeds 4500/-. These low wages have an impact on the household economy especially where women are the bread earners in their family. This implies that the *beedi* industry is exploiting women *beedi* workers more while empowering them less.

Primary Occupation of Household: It is also observed that the primary occupation of majority of the *beedi* worker households belong to informal work sector (45.33 percent) followed by agriculture (22 percent households), business (18.67 percent) and the remaining 14 percent households are engaged in some other types of activities.

Nature of Work: It is also found from the study that a significant proportion of respondents are home-based *beedi* workers (80.67 percent).

Working Hours for *Beedi* Rolling: The data reveals that women are compelled to engage themselves in *beedi* rolling for long hours. Here, 32 percent respondents reported to work for 6-8 hours, 23.63 percent reported to work for 8-10 hours, and 19.03 percent for more than 10 hours

a day. Besides doing this job they still have to do all the household activities as well. This depicts that they hardly get any time for rest. To earn more money these workers are compelled to work continuously for long hours sitting in improper postures that create a variety of health problems. Direct inhalation of tobacco dust and flakes also poses severe health risks to both the workers and to others nearby. Due to their prolonged *beedi*-rolling shifts, the women *beedi* workers have a greater risk and occurrence of occupational diseases such as respiratory problems, dermatological issues, muscular-skeletal conditions, dehydration, lower back pain, abdominal discomfort, and psychological stress.

Experience of Work: Since, *beedi* rolling is a traditional occupation; it is observed that 34 percent workers are engaged for 10-15 years, 29.46 percent workers are engaged for 15-20 years and 19.21 percent workers are engaged for more than 20 years in *beedi* rolling activity.

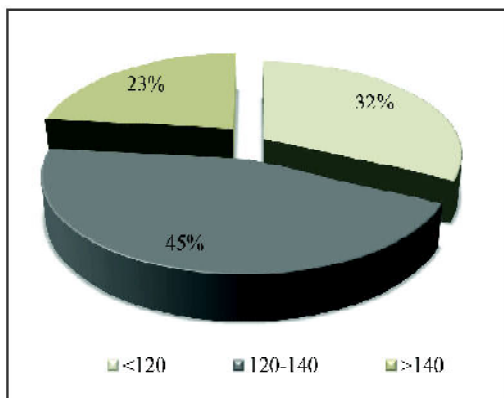


Fig 7. Wage Rate for Rolling 1000 *Beedi*

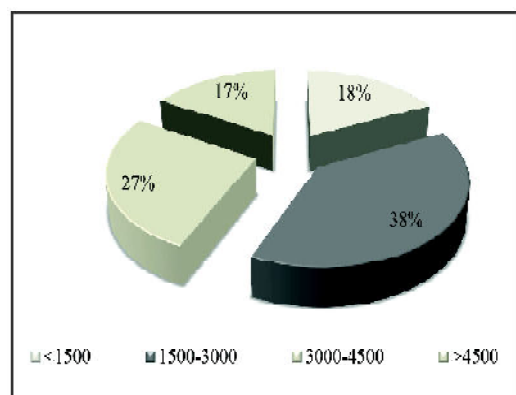


Fig 8. Monthly Income of *Beedi* Workers

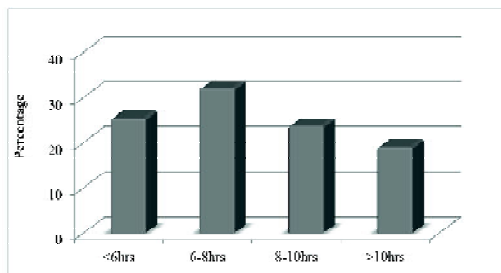


Fig 9. Hours of *Beedi* Rolling

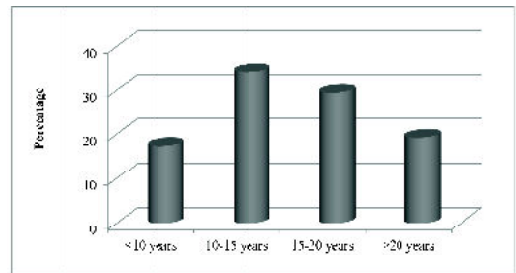


Fig 10. Experience of Work

Profile of the Respondents making Household Decisions

Profile of the women *beedi* workers making household decisions has been shown in Table 2. It is inferred from the Table that only 56.2 percent women of less than 20 years of age enjoy

the autonomy of making family decisions while 63.8 percent women of 21 to 40 years and 76.5 percent women of 41 to 60 years can positively take part in household decisions. It indicates that higher-aged women have more autonomy than younger women. Study finds that 82.3 percent of Hindu respondents have decision-making power whereas the percentage of non-Hindu respondents is comparatively less (61.25 percent). The study indicates a direct link between the level of education of the respondents and decision-making power. It is showing that only 44.7 percent of women with no education can make household decisions, whereas 88.5 percent of women who have a higher secondary level of education can participate in taking household decisions. It is also showing that decision making capacity is prevalent in households where the household heads are literate. Data shows that only 58.5 percent women can make household decisions where the household heads are illiterate while it is 76 percent in case of households where the household heads are literate. The family size has an inverse relationship with the decision making capacity of women, indicating that 73.6 percent women having a small family can take household decisions while only 61.2 percent women belonging to a large family can enjoy this opportunity. Level of income of women workers has also a link with women's autonomy. Study shows that 67.5 percent respondents whose monthly income is Rs.<1500/- have the autonomy of making household decisions while the percentage is 87.2 when they earn Rs. >4500/- monthly. The wealth status shows that 75.5 percent women from very poor families also have the decision making power. Study reveals that there is a lack of autonomy where the relationship between the respondent and other family members is not good. It is seen from the table that 55.5 percent women can participate in household decisions where the relationship is not good while it is 83.5 percent when the relationship of respondents with family members is good. It can also be seen from Table - 2 that 82.5 percent women can enjoy the autonomy of taking household decisions when the gender equitable attitude exists in the family. No discrimination among male and female members leads to greater chances of women's participation in household decision making. Study also reveals that exposure to mass media can also play an important role in taking decisions and 85 percent women who are exposed to mass media can participate in household decisions.

Factors Determining the Decision Making Capacity of Women Beedi Workers

The logistic regression model examines different factors which are affecting the decision-making capacity of women *beedi* workers in the study area. The result of Cox & Snell R square and Nagelkerke R square indicates that the independent variables can explain 68.6% to 73.3% variation in the dependent variable.

Result of logistic regression indicates that the decision making capacity of women *beedi* workers is associated with age, educational level, educational status of household head, family size, level of monthly income, quality of relationship with family members and gender equitable attitude in family.

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents taking Household Decisions

Respondent's Characteristics		Decision Making Capacity	
		Yes	No
Age	<20 years	56.2	43.8
	21-40 years	63.8	36.2
	41-60 years	76.5	23.5
Religion	Hindu	82.3	17.7
	Non-Hindu	61.25	38.75
Educational level of Respondent	Illiterate	44.7	55.3
	Primary	62.2	37.8
	Secondary	72.5	27.5
	Higher Secondary	80.2	19.8
	Above Higher Secondary	88.5	11.5
Educational Status of Household Head	Illiterate	58.5	41.5
	Literate	76	24
Family Size	Small (1-3 members)	73.6	26.4
	Moderate (4-6 members)	66.2	33.8
	Large (>6 members)	61.2	38.8
Level of Monthly Income of Respondent	<1500	67.5	32.5
	1500-3000	71.2	28.8
	3000-4500	78.5	21.5
	>4500	87.2	12.8
Wealth Status	Very Poor	75.5	24.5
	Poor	73.2	26.8
	Middle	69.2	30.8
Quality of Relationship with family Member	Good	83.5	16.5
	Poor	55.5	44.5
Gender Equitable Attitude	Equitable	82.5	17.5
	In-equitable	68	32
Media Exposure	Exposed	85	15
	Not Exposed	66.5	33.5

Source: Field Survey

From the analysis, it is observed that the age of a woman has a significant impact on her decision-making power with a significance value of .003 ($p < 0.05$) at 5% significance level, indicating that with an increase in age, the probability of taking family decisions of women also increases. It is found that women of 21-40 years of age have .765 times and women of 41-60 years of age have .834 times more probability to make decisions than women of less than 20 years of age. It is also found that non-Hindu women have .698 times less decision-making capacity than Hindu women. Educational level of women *beedi* workers is statistically significant with the decision-making capacity of women with a value of .000 at 5% significance level, ($p < 0.05$), indicating that with the increase in literacy rate women's decision-making capacity is likely to be increased. The result of the analysis also shows that women having primary level of education have .650 times, women having secondary level of education have .779 times, women having higher secondary level of education have 1.097 times and women having above higher secondary level of education have 2.011 times more likely to have greater decision making power than women having no education.

Similarly, educational status of the household head has also an effect ($p < 0.05$), at 5% significance level, on the respondent's decision-making capacity. Women *beedi* workers have .785 times more probability to make family decisions where the household heads are literate. It depicts that educated male members have an attitude towards accepting women's decisions and women can take part in taking any kind of decision.

The analysis also shows that women of small family size enjoy a higher degree of autonomy in taking decisions. Women of a moderate family (4-6 members) have .245 times and women of a large family (more than 6 members) have .321 times less probability to participate in household decisions compared to women of a small family (1-3 members).

It is found from the analysis that women's financial contribution is a major factor in determining the participation in household decisions. Here, the level of income of women *beedi* workers is found to be a significant predictor of women's decision-making capacity with a value of .001 at 5 % significance level, ($p < 0.05$). Women who earn 1500 to 3000 are 1.313 times more likely, women who earn 3000-4500 are 2.009 times more likely and women who earn more than 4500 are 3.210 times more likely to have greater decision-making power than women who earn less than 1500 per month.

The study found no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between very poor, poor, and middle-class families in deciding by women. It indicates that the wealth status of the family does not affect women's autonomy.

Quality of relationship of respondents with family members also has a significant impact on her decision-making capacity with a sig value of .001 ($p < 0.05$) at 5% significance level. Good spousal relationship or bonding with other family members generates trust or faith and increases

Table 3: Logistic Regression model showing the factors associated with Decision Making Capacity of Women *Beedi* Workers

Variables in the Equation								
Variables in the equation	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
1 Age			6.129	2	.003			
Age(1)	.245	.336	29.701	1	.000	.765	.699	.832
Age(2)	.181	.045	16.251	1	.000	.834	.764	.911
Religion(1)	-.358	.254	9.877	1	.002	.698	.554	.985
Educational Level			23.231	4	.000			
Educational Level(1)	.145	.410	109.716	1	.000	.650	.552	.723
Educational Level(2)	.249	.045	30.182	1	.000	.779	.713	.852
Educational Level(3)	.260	.064	16.734	1	.000	1.097	1.145	1.470
Educational Level(4)	.700	.088	63.643	1	.000	2.011	1.696	2.393
Educational Status of Household Head(1)	0	.621	29.485	1	.000	.785	.635	.880
Family Size			17.528	2	.001			
Family Size(1)	-.357	.261	11.257	1	.000	.245	.115	.369
Family Size(2)	-.258	.387	13.254	1	.002	.321	.225	.559
Level of income			53.487	3	.001			
Level of income(1)	.309	.374	.876	1	.010	1.313	.698	3.108
Level of income(2)	1.021	.451	4.821	1	.026	2.009	1.107	4.055
Level of income(3)	1.012	.510	5.100	1	.021	3.210	1.221	5.369
Wealth Status			21.365	2	.880			
Wealth Status(1)	.568	.668	17.233	2	.074	.887	.658	.998
Wealth Status(2)	.475	.369	12.253	1	.060	.985	.475	1.288
Quality of relationship with family member(1)	-2.170	.612	8.593	1	.001	.039	.011	.098
Gender equitable attitude in family(1)	-2.008	.481	3.124	1	.000	.210	.160	.280
Media Exposure(1)	-.876	.568	8.354	1	.001	.758	.552	1.458
Constant	-14.398	2.180	43.622	1	.002	.000		

Reference Level: <20 years, Hindu, Illiterate, Illiterate, Small Family, <1500/-. Very Poor, Good, Equitable Attitude, Exposed.

Source: Computed by the researcher

communication and open discussion among women regarding any mandatory decision. In this case, women who don't have a good relationship with family members are .039 times less likely to have decision-making power.

Gender equitable attitude in family is another important factor in taking women's decisions. Families, where gender equitability exists, are more prone to accept a woman's say. Such families have the same attitude for male and female members. Respondents belonging to families where gender equitable attitude doesn't exist have .210 times less probability of taking family decisions than families where gender equitable attitude exists.

The findings also show that women who are not exposed to any kind of mass media are .758 times less likely to make household decisions compared to women who are exposed to mass media.

From the above findings over the analysis, it can be said that the decision-making power of women *beedi* workers is influenced by age, level of education, educational status of household head, family size, level of monthly income, good quality of relationship with family members, gender equitable attitude in family, and media exposure. While it is found that the wealth status of the family has no significant impact on the decision-making power of women *beedi* workers in the study area.

Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to determine the socio-demographic and economic factors which influence the decision-making capacity of women *beedi* workers in Tufanganj Subdivision of Koch Bihar district. The analysis reveals that the socio-economic status of women *beedi* workers in the study area is very low and the percentage of women *beedi* workers who exclusively take the household decisions is also very less. The findings of the binary logistic regression revealed that age, religion, level of education, educational status of household head, family size, and level of monthly income are the most important predictors to determine the autonomy of women *beedi* workers in the study area. Good quality of relationship with family members and gender-equitable attitudes in the family also promote the decision-making capacity of women. It is also found that women who are exposed to mass media have more autonomy. The model also showed that the wealth status of the family has no effect on the decision-making capacity of women. The study revealed that higher age, higher literacy rate, and higher income give more autonomy to the women *beedi* workers.

Hence it can be concluded that the autonomy of these particular women needs to be increased in the right ways so that they may give their valued thoughts to the family and society as a whole. And the improvement in socio-economic conditions is expected to ensure the decision-making capacity of these women.

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