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A Woman as a Decision-Maker: Exploring the "Lived Experience" at Home and Outside

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Abstract

In this research paper, we look at decision-making by women in India from a contextual perspective. This study looks at decision making by women as based on four possible contexts that may arise, and where decisions are called for. These contexts are qualified based on two broad parameters, namely the level of involvement (dictated by the stakes at play) and the predisposition displayed. Involvement is qualified as high or low (on a continuum), whilst predisposition is stated as either cognitive or affective. The results of the research study reveal a difficult act of balancing that women have to do in terms of decision making at home. They need to get their decisions, whether it is about their career, or their choice of mate, about home, marriage, children ratified by their husbands or parents, women also try to ensure that such decisions do not reflect poorly on their homes. This calls for them to balance between options and often sacrifice their self-interest in the interest of their "home."

Keywords

Women, Decision-Making, Contexts, Cognitive, Affective

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A Woman as a Decision-Maker: Exploring the “Lived Experience” at Home and Outside

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In this research paper, we look at decision-making by women in India from a contextual perspective. This study looks at decision making by women as based on four possible contexts that may arise, and where decisions are called for. These contexts are qualified based on two broad parameters, namely the level of involvement (dictated by the stakes at play) and the predisposition displayed. Involvement is qualified as high or low (on a continuum), whilst predisposition is stated as either cognitive or affective. The results of the research study reveal a difficult act of balancing that women have to do in terms of decision making at home. They need to get their decisions, whether it is about their career, or their choice of mate, about home, marriage, children ratified by their husbands or parents, women also try to ensure that such decisions do not reflect poorly on their homes. This calls for them to balance between options and often sacrifice their self-interest in the interest of their “home.” Keywords: Women, Decision-Making, Contexts, Cognitive, Affective

The post-independence era saw the Indian constitution giving equal opportunities to men and women on paper yet women in India remain in the shadows in comparison to men (IndiaToday, 2015). Bishop (1985) of Kenya stressed, “Train a man and you train an individual, train a woman and you build a nation” (as cited in Mehta & Saraswat, 2014, p. 33). Viewed from this perspective, the position of women in any society is an index of its civilization.

The status of women all over the world has lately become the focus of national and international concern. The struggle for improving women’s “status begun” in 19th century with the declaration of International Women’s Decade (1976-1985) (UN, n.d.). The United Nations Conference on the status of women held in Kenya in 1985 emphasized that the development of society requires full participation by all sections of the population and women in particular. Women contribute more than half of the duties and responsibilities of the family but are hardly empowered to participate in decision making (United Nations, n.d.). They were not given any rights, they were supposed to do domestic work and to look after children (Baba, Zain, Idris, & Sanni, 2015; Singh, 2014).

Gender roles, as they pertain to the family, are interactive. Being a daughter implies that there is a mother or a father. It suggests that being a daughter entails expectations about a female's behavior vis-à-vis a parent and a parent's behavior vis-à-vis the daughter (Falk, n.d.). The feminist movement influences gender role change both in and outside the family in multiple ways. Broadly speaking, the movement may be viewed as a social process focusing on female role identities and prescriptions. Its basic premise is that gender ascriptions produce power inequities in family systems where the male is the primary paid earner and the female is confined to domestic duties. Gradually with the passage of time, the concept of “working women” came into existence. A working woman refers to a woman who works outside her home for a wage or salary. Women are compelled to leave the security of their home due to economic necessity and hence they do not have enough time to look after their children, leave alone their health (Chusmir, Moore, & Adams, 1990).

Women began to come out of the domestic sphere and have begun to take up professional roles outside their homes. This has helped them to realize their potential, to

broaden their outlook and to create a new meaning in their lives. The traditional role of a housewife has gradually evolved into the dual and more fulfilling role of a working woman and housewife. As is well known, the right of every individual to earn livelihood is the expression of one's economic freedom (Chouhan, Choudhary, & Swarnakar, 2016). This change is due to education and economic independence. Education and economic independence play a vital role in changing mindset and attitudes. Education increases women's awareness and leads to their overall development thereby helping the nation to prosper (Ahmed & Mistry, 2010; OECD, 2012).

The presence of a woman is most seen, felt and experienced in the family. In fact, the woman is most visible at home. In India, women play a pivotal role in the family and the community, shouldering all the responsibilities providing for the needs and comforts of the male members of the family and the children, running the household, managing within the limited budget. In the days gone by the female was born into a well-defined community of women within her particular family. Her tasks were cut-out, to be trained in learning the mandatory skills of household work, cooking, rearing and bearing of children, not to step out of this discrete feminine and domestic sphere of activity. She had to learn the virtues of womanhood and consciously inculcate culturally designated feminine roles. She was trained to a lifetime of service and self-denial and to lead a life of dependency. They provide these services round the clock without any payment and yet they are considered economically dependent on their husband. Women have been given a secondary status in social life.

Women's work includes agriculture, animal husbandry, industrial and household enterprises all are productive but neither are they adequately paid nor is their contribution accounted in the national income (WEF, 2015). Employment exposes women to the outside world and as a result they are likely to develop new outlook towards life, new aspirations and awareness about their place in society. There is a general impression that working outside the home improves participation in decision making activities (Gopal & Shobha, 2012). On the other hand, it may also happen that the housewives because of better time and specialization in different household activities are likely to wield higher influence in decision making on the home front. However, the recent changes in the institution of family, education and economic independence of women have affected the traditional system and brought some structural changes in the status and roles of women in the family. Education, no doubt widens the mental horizons and releases from the clutches of ignorance and superstition, it makes a person aware about rights and improves decision making capacity.

In modern times, higher education facilitated women's entry into gainful employment, which has really helped them to bring about a change in the economic power structure of a family in favor of women (Patil, 2016). The human society, today, is witnessing unprecedented changes in all walks of life due to rapid development of science and technology. Consequently, individuals are called upon to make an adjustment, which involves series of decisions. Every action of an individual is the result of conscious or unconscious decision (Smith, 2008). The present decision has its roots in the past and reflects upon the future decisions. With the changing outlook of the society towards women and her role in various activities both inside and outside the family system, the traditional, male chauvinistic role of the father as one to possess the best decision making ability in the family has also undergone drastic transformation (Sarmah, 2015). Women, in most part of the world today are no longer compelled to be under the garb of veils and are coming out in the open, shouldering responsibilities in various kinds of decision making and standing at par with men at every tread.

This attitude was a thought completely undreamt of four or five decades back when the men of the family were the sole bread earners and the only person involved in the role of any sort of decision making. The women, on the other hand, were meant to bear the encumbrance

of childbirth and rearing and bringing up children along with the responsibility of looking after the home front and the myriad needs of the husband.

Studies have revealed an increasing number of cases where the role of women in the family decision making, their role in controlling family finances and making decision as to where the various expenses should be incurred is primary or at least shared equally with the men (UN-DAW, 2005). Another direction to the role of women in the family decision making process has been lent by the role of parenting children. Unlike days of yore, when rearing up children was the duty of the mother, as the male members were busy outside, today, with women taking active part in the professional genre, fathers are taking equal interest in the family and shaping their child's life (Yeung, 2010).

Literature Review and Decision Making Patterns of Women

Puri (1971) observed that women played an important role in decision making of home aspects while they were consulted by their counter parts in activities related to farm (Puri, 1971). In some cases, like marriage, farm related tasks and expenditure pattern the heads of the family were the main decision makers, whereas in cases such as education of children, selection of occupation of children the whole family made the decisions. Benjamin (1962) reported that "joint" decision making appeared to be at its peak in the "beginning stage" with largest amount of consultation in decision making (Benjamin, 1962). Families with teen age children exhibited lowest amount of consultation in decision making. In the "launching stage" the decision-making pattern was of "beginning stage." Women appeared to be most active in home management and men in money management (Sinha & Sinha, 2007). Women reported that they become more emotionally involved in decision making discussions than men (Caprino, 2016; Huston, 2016).

Devi and Rayalu (2003) findings suggested that working women perceived higher levels of empowerment in all the aspects related to self-decision than non-working women (Devi & Rayalu, 2003). Mona Mehta and Shilpi Saraswat (2014) in a study titled "Decision Making Pattern of Working and Nonworking Women in Family Affairs" found that the decision-making pattern was collective with regards to certain areas of family affairs. Furthermore, it was also found that most of the women were educated but had lesser participation in decision making (O'Neil & Domingo, 2015). Women contribute more than half of the duties and responsibilities of the family but are hardly empowered to participate in decision making. (Mehta & Saraswat, 2014). FAO reported that women are less likely than men to own land or livestock, adopt new technologies, use credit or other financial services, or receive education or extension advice. In some cases, women do not even control the use of their own time (FAO, 2010). Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes (2007) concluded that women throughout the world face many social or cultural constraints to political empowerment and many are discouraged from engaging in public decision-making processes altogether. Patriarchal structures continue to exclude women from aspects of political life and women often encounter prejudice based on assumptions that women lack "masculine" traits, such as leadership and levelheadedness, necessary to succeed in politics (Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007).

Mehare and Nikhade (1978) pointed out that in rural families the decision-making team is usually the husband, wife and sons who are old enough to express their ideas and opinion about the home affairs (SWMENA, 2011). In an ideal home, all major decisions were taken by husband in consultation with his wife and grown up children but the final say is with the husband (Mehare & Nikhade, 1978). Chhayadevi (1979) explored that the participation of farm women in home aspects is more than farm aspect. But in most of cases they are taking joint decisions rather than independent decisions (Chhayadevi, 1979). Dubey et al. (1982) found that

women's participation was high in activities like utilization of milk, number of milk animals to rear, quantity of milk to be kept and sold, medium participation in activities like fixing the rate of milk, which animals to be sold, selection of breed, treatment of animals and housing of animals (Dubey, Singh, & Khera, 1982). Their decision-making participation was low in utilization of income, vaccination, grazing of animals and breeding practices in animals.

Sharma, Rao, and Sharma (2013) research stated that men dominated in majority of the farm decisions in rural families. Decisions related to buying and selling of land, machines and other agricultural implements; improvements of harvest and livestock management were mainly taken by head of the family or husbands (Sharma, Rao, & Sharma, 2013). Raazia Hassan Naqvi and Muhammad Ibrar (2015) elicited that in majority of the rural family most of the decisions regarding household and agricultural matter are taken up by the family head alone. Wife is consulted for only households matter and not being involved for taking independent or joint decision in the agricultural matters. In a negligible proportion the wife takes independent decisions. Giriappa (1986) considered that the role and status of women has been undergoing a continuous change in recent years in both female and male headed households, the participation of women in decision making was found to be increased (Giriappa, 1986).

Susheela, Surendra, and Phadnis (1990) expressed that the type of family was found to be the influencing factor in decision making as it was evident that in nuclear households' percentage of joint decision was found to be high in children's education, marriage and also in all other aspects when compared with that of head of the family alone making decision in joint and extended households (Susheela, Surendra, & Phadnis, 1990). I. Bala, Moorti, and Sharma (1993) in their study on participation of rural women in decision making revealed that more than 90 per cent of the decisions, the participation of women was only of supportive nature. Illiteracy, lack of knowledge and awareness were found to be major reasons for lower participation (Bala, Moorti, & Sharma, 1993; Lal & Kumar, 2007). Munjal, Punia, and Sangwan (1985) reported from their study on role of rural women in decision making for credit procurement that money related decisions are dominated by males and meagre involvement of rural women in decision making regarding credit procurement (Sangwan, 1990). Jain and Varma (1992) suggested that animal husbandry decisions were found over whelming rest with husbands and wife's contribution was marginal (Jain & Varma, 1992). Patki and Nikhade (1999) noticed that husband and wife play important role in decision making. It was seen that in skillful and risk bearing practices women decision making was less (Patki & Nikhade, 1999).

Minaxi and Lopamudra (2000) showed that women are considered neither knowledgeable nor competent enough to participate in the process of decision making. Major decisions about farming are mainly taken by the male family head. The influence of women in decision making about farming affairs was found to be only supportive in nature (Minaxi & Lopamudra, 2000). Muzamil Jan and Shubeena Akhtar (2008) research reveals that there is no significant differences between married and unmarried women regarding their decision making power. Women generally possess low decision making power and are mainly dependent on masculine and/or familial decision making (Jan & Akhtar, 2008). Kavita Baliyan (2014) observed that women's role was found prominent in petty household issues only. In most of the cases women acted as initiators in deciding about some major household affairs but final decisions were being taken ultimately by men. In rural India, even though women participate in economic activities they have little role in decision making particularly in matters related to agriculture and financial matters (Baliyan, 2014).

Gogdand and Hembade (2014) findings clearly showed that no women make decisions without the permission of their husband for selling the animals. For milk consumption at home a whole decision is taken by the husband therefore no women make their own decisions (Gogdand & Hembade, 2014). Sabina Bano (2014) stated that participation of women in

decision making is likely to be affected by socio-economic status of women. Gender differences led women to suppress in the decision making on various issues occurring in their daily activities. Roles and responsibilities of women and their choices are restricted to specific sphere (Bano, 2014).

The research literature overwhelmingly shows that women's participation in decision making is very low. Patriarchal structures have ensured that women have little say in decisions concerning family, family occupations, about finances, about her children or about anything else. The decisions concerning family or public life is taken by men (often husbands) and women are merely expected to follow the same. At times, women even do not have control over how they spend their time. This is by and large true in most context, although with slight differences, – be it rural/urban women, married/unmarried women or working/non-working women. Considering the above literature, it became pertinent to study the role of women in decision making in the “home” context. “Home” is considered the women's domain – a place she pretty much creates and nurtures. Such a study can enhance the understanding that's been gained about women, particularly from the perspective of decision contexts. The findings of the study support the literature on the role of women in decision making. Women need approval for most decision made at home either from their husbands or from their parents. At the same time, women try to safeguard the interests of their home and children from those decisions that impact them negatively. This not only calls for them to do a tough task of balancing between need for approval and their desire to protect their “turf” but also many times women have to make sacrifices and let go their own self-interest in the interest of their home and children.

Research Objective

The objective of the research is to study “woman as decision-makers” in the “home” context from a single case research perspective. Such a study is especially relevant in a scenario where it is assumed that women only make decisions regarding domestic issues relevant to the upkeep of home. This study intends to explore decision making scenario beyond those that are domestic and steps into wider arenas of home-related decision making. The findings of the study intend to enhance the understanding that's been gained about women, especially from the perspective of decision contexts. As academic researchers interested in understanding socio-cultural and contextual influences on decision making, the study of a woman juggling duties of a professional and homemaker provided opportunities for valuable insights. Such insights would better help all those who would wish to engage with such a decision maker, either at a personal or an institutional level. The phenomenological interview sittings with the participant stretched over a few months with multiple sittings that lasted 45 minutes to an hour. Interview schedules were drawn up based on the convenience of the participant and were done at neutral settings allowing the participant to express openly and willingly.

Research Method

The research study uses the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Ashworth, 2006; Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; Eagleton, 1983; Finlay, 2003; Fouche, 1993; Gorden, 1969; Groenewald, 2004; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Lippitz, 1997; Maypole & Davies, 2001; Measor, 1985; Oakley, 1981; Schwandt, 1997; Vandenberg, 1997) to get to the heart of decision making contexts women are subject to, whilst at home. The researchers engage and participate in the “lived” experience of the respondents to arrive at interpretations regarding decision making. The study sacrifices breadth for acute depth and so engages with a purposive limited sample of chosen women.

The name of the research participant has been masked to safeguard confidentiality. The participant has been tagged as Mrs. H for the sake of the study. At the time of the study Mrs. H was 35 years old, and living with her husband, their two daughters aged 9 & 4 and her parents, in their own house in a small town, adjoining a bustling metro-city. Mrs. H is a graduate in micro-biology and post-graduate in Business administration and currently works as a Professor in a private university in Bangalore. Previously discussed in the literature review section, most context discussed presented the same picture of women with respect to decision making. Some contexts cited were rural versus urban women, married versus unmarried women and working versus non-working women. All these contexts, the decision making was dominated by the man. Home is an important context as that is often considered as the territory of women (UNCCD, 2006) and their decision making in this context needs to be studied. In this respect Mrs. H is married, working, urban woman who manages home as well. In a way Mrs. H represents multiple context, including home and hence serves as ideal for being a subject of study for this research.

Data Collection

Mrs. H was selected for a phenomenological study aimed at understanding how she made decisions across contexts arising out of her life. Mrs. H was chosen based on an initial screening done to ascertain her decision-making roles while at home and while she pursued a professional vocation. The University to which the researchers belong to is one that is certified as an institution of higher learning and where research studies are actively pursued and conducted by the academic community. The participation in the research was voluntary and agreed to by Mrs. H, and an undertaking was provided to her that all data would be kept confidential and would be used only for research purposes. Furthermore, it was also stated that Mrs. H's identity would not be disclosed. The depth, richness and texture of Mrs. H's narrative helped keep the focus of the project and to carry out a detailed idiographic case study. After an initial telephone conversation, the authors met Mrs. H at the second author's office to discuss what participation in the study would entail. Mrs. H gave her consent to the study. An interview schedule was developed and the second author carried out a dialogical interview. The interview took place in second author's office and was recorded onto a dictaphone. The researcher conducting the interview transcribed the data and after all data was available, the same was analyzed by all the researchers according to the IPA guidelines established by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009).

Research Methodology

Not a single quantifiable reality has been assumed in the current study. It is assumed rather that the process of decision-making in the home context is individually constructed through active sense making, occurring mostly through interaction with others (Johnson & Cassell, 2001, p. 131). Hence by inviting women to talk about their decision-making experiences at home, the research aimed to capture how they make decisions and what experiences they have when they are making those decisions. In doing so the researcher necessarily assumed a fundamentally interpretative role (e.g., Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). This study was motivated by the distinctive approach to qualitative psychology developed by Smith (2008) specifically for how women make decisions at home.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method of enquiry is not a prescriptive approach; rather, it provides a set of flexible guidelines, which can be adapted by individual researchers in light of their research objectives (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The method

involved treating the participants as one set of data and recording their “lived experiences” on decision-making at home. The researchers move between inductive and deductive positions.

IPA has its origins in health psychology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and has theoretical roots in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978) and the social cognition paradigm (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Critical realism accepts that stable and enduring aspects may exist other than the concepts that man proposes. Human experiences are varied and come from their experience of reality that they go through. The human speech and behavior reflects these differences as supported by the social cognition model (Fade, 2004). Hence phenomenology is concerned with human understanding and originated in the ideas of Edmund Husserl, first put forward in 1936 (Husserl, 1970). Husserl did not think that empirical studies can capture the real understanding of the world. Instead he suggested the significance of the experiences that a person has in reality unpolluted by any other past experiences and viewpoints. It is these experiences that Husserl called “lived experiences.”

However, according to the views of Husserl, an analysis cannot be phenomenological and interpretative at the same time. But a phenomenological analysis has been developed by other ways too. Here it is important to mention the researches of Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1976) who stressed on the unavoidability of the world being perceived through an historical context of socio-cultural background. Therefore, it was concluded that interpretative Phenomenological Research is phenomenological in that it seeks an insider perspective on the lived experiences of individuals, and interpretative in that it acknowledges the researcher’s personal beliefs and standpoint and embraces the view that understanding requires interpretation (Fade, 2004).

Smith et al. (2009) describe two approaches to IPA. The first is the basic method, termed the ideographic case-study approach. This method is suitable for small samples of up to ten respondents and enables the researcher to write up a single case or an exploration of themes shared between cases. In the current study, ideographic case study method has been used, using a single respondent. The method involves verbatim transcription of what has been said by the respondent and then reading between the lines (interpretation) to attach meaning to the objectives of the research. The transcription should also account for non-verbal communication of the respondent recorded by the researcher immediately after the interview, till it remains fresh in his/her mind.

Research Findings

Case – Mrs. H

Mrs. H is a married with two school going children. She also works at a fulltime position with a leading institution based out of Bangalore. Most of her wakeful time is spent at work, and it is in the evening that she catches up with family. The choice of Mrs. H was a purposive one, as the research participant represents a unique cohort of women who manage affairs at home while also working full-time professionally. Keeping the Indian cultural context in mind, it is important to note that it is still considerably rare to find women who juggle two important responsibilities at the same time. Mrs. H’s husband works full time in a professional job and is open to his wife’s professional work as this brings home two paychecks that can help in managing expense and other investments.

Mrs. H lives in her own home, a constructed one with her husband, two daughters, and her parents. The home she lives at has a ground and a first floor. Her parents live on the ground floor and everyone else live son the first. Mrs. H counts herself lucky to have her parents live along, as they prove to be of invaluable help both in domestic chores, and well as to take care of her two daughters.

It isn't easy to live without your parents support in a city. I am glad my parents are with me and so they can take care of kids when both of us aren't around. It's even more valuable to have them with us as we have two girls to look after. You know how it's like to raise daughters in India. It isn't easy.

Mrs. H at the outset characterized herself as someone seeking "justifications." Meaning, she would only engage in something if she could find a sense of logic about that thing. And this logic needn't necessarily be acceptable to her significant others, as long as it appealed to her. Conversely a lack of a logic association didn't cut much ice with her.

I guess it must be the way I was raised. I need to know why something is done. I am not one to believe everything that's passed down to me. I need to know why. I need to see sense and that must be backed with some rational explanations. It's okay if the others are not in line with my outlook. For me to be convinced, I must see logic!

Decision on a Life Partner

The practice of logic was first illustrated in Mrs. H's choice of a life partner. Having met her would be husband while at her past graduate studies at college, Mrs. H didn't respond to her husband's proposal at first. Instead she chose to take it to her parents to seek their approval.

When my husband proposed to me, I went to my parents and had a discussion with them. Being a very conservative person I didn't say yes to him before I consulted with my parents. Although I felt that I was mature enough to take decisions, however in matters like these I felt my parents would know better. If the decision was to be about my career I would have taken it myself.

The approval did come through though the scene changed into one of reluctance at a later stage. The hitch came from Mrs. H's father who required that her daughter's horoscope match with that of her suitor's. Mrs. H, not much of a believer in stars and planets disagreed, to the extent she demanded that her horoscope not even be consulted for a decision with regard to her marriage. Mrs. H's father didn't take too kindly to her defiance and stood his ground. The standoff in the name of horoscope lasted almost a year by which time Mrs. H was able to convince her father about how suitor's suitability should be judged on parameters other than those dictated by horoscopes and beliefs of similar kind.

When asked about whether there could be times when H would not be insistent on logic, H agreed she wouldn't insist on logic, and having her way if the emotions of others are involved. Again, H made it clear it wasn't that logic was not important in making decisions; it was just that she was flexible at times as it enabled her to avoid conflicts she felt would be detrimental to all. Mrs. H was also at pains to explain to explain how attached she was to her parents. This was lest we believe that logic is what dictates all her actions. Despite her strong sense of emotional attachment to her parents, Mrs. H persisted with logic to counter what her father had to say about horoscopes and their importance in a choice of mate, so that the rational proposition she was forwarding would be convincing to her father.

Though I don't agree, I can understand where my parents are coming from. They are traditional and very conservative in their mindset. I knew I would have to

present my logic with care and be patient enough to bring them around over time. I am glad I was able to do so without too much of conflict, even though it took time.

Suffice to say it worked as her father came around to seeing her way of making a choice of her life partner. Mrs. H in pulling this feat off had balanced between something she considered a belief, and another that she considered as needing to be a rational choice. This meant the use of horoscopes was accommodated as long as it did not dictate choices Mrs. H had to make. In effect, the balance was between being accepted by significant others whilst maintaining a hold over decision making in her personal life.

Decision on Education and Choice of Vocation

Mrs. H was vocal in pointing out that both her choice of an MBA as a subject of professional study, and her vocation as a professor weren't welcomed by all. Yet she stood her ground in doing both. Her significant others which included her immediate family and close friends felt that a graduation in micro-biology meant the way forward to do a master's study in the same discipline and probably further research. But Mrs. H was bent on wanting to learn business management, and that's what she did.

In taking a decision on pursuing an MBA, Mrs. H was setting herself up for better career prospects. In addition, she was sure she didn't want to be relegated to only doing housework. Mrs. H felt that her sense of value would come from productive work engaged in outside of home.

I was sure I was not going to turn into a typical Indian housewife. I enjoyed my sense of independence and wanted to continue enjoying the same after marriage. I was also very keen to do something professionally and that too only that which I enjoyed doing. The pressure on me to conform was intense, but in the end, I had my way. I am glad I did.

Mrs. H describes her husband as possessing a totally different personality as compared to hers. Mrs. H's husband is an order seeker, whilst she is tolerant of a lack of order if the circumstances so dictate. For example, when to wake up a weekend and what to do doesn't have to follow a set orderly pattern. But such patterns are welcome to Mrs. H if it relates to a professional matter such as pursuing her research interest, or preparing for a class to teach.

Mrs. H's initiation into greater levels of "order" to life post marriage has had its ill effects according to her. She felt her creative frame of mind that led her to write poetry for instance, before marriage had weakened considerably. She felt she had lost the urge to write as greater levels of order seeped into her life. In wistfully mulling over this loss of her creative instincts, Mrs. H even called her move to order, a "compromise" for order.

Sometimes I wish I hadn't compromised. But then who knows what would have happened. What cost would I have had to bear? Who knows? I know I can still pursue my creative instincts now. I know I will have to find the time, and I think if I put my mind to it, I can.

Decision Calls on Rearing Children

A call for order at home at the behest of her husband meant Mrs. H had to make adjustments to the way she raised her children. Such adjustments were not entered into based

on convictions, but on compromises that would help keep the “peace” at home. A telling area for such a compromise was in the choice of place at home for a particular activity. Mrs. H’s husband required that study be done only in the room assigned for it, and not anywhere else in the home. “Now I am being hypocrite, if my husband were around, I would ask my children to study only in the study room. But if he wasn’t at home, they could be flexible in their choice of place for study.”

Mrs. H felt compelled at practicing this hypocrisy because it would then eliminate probable conflicts. If she were to see her daughter reading a book lying on the couch, she would ask her to use the study room if her husband was around. This would help avoid a showdown between her husband and her daughter, one she felt would not be conducive to the latter. Mrs. H also noted that she would use the dialogue approach in getting her elder daughter to come around to the father’s need for order.

Mrs. H also stated that she’s careful in not letting resentment creep into her daughters as a response to their father’s behaviour. When her elder expressed consternation over her father’s diktats, Mrs. H has stayed firm on having her daughter do what the father required. In Mrs. H’s words, for her it was the search for “balance” between order and the lack of it, and its application to her family’s daily life.

I think I am the person best suited to keep us together without too many conflicts. I can read my daughters better than my husband, and so I know when to intervene and defuse a situation and when not to. I can also be the sounding board for my children when the need arises. I think the key here is to be a good listener and also to be less judgmental.

Mrs. H also in many ways was trying to exact a conflict-less home environment through an active seeking of such “balance.” But this did not mean that she would wish her daughters also to turn out the way she did, or the way she was fashioning their family life. Mrs. H was agreeable in attributing this need for balance as being drawn from the way her mother used to maintaining a certain “peace” at her home. As child Mrs. H was witness to lack of conflicts because she felt her mother may have defused the conflict before it was blown open in the family.

Again, balance also meant conflicts would be entertained if the outcomes sought are necessary ones. For example, Mrs. H has railed against her husband for him taking to smoking. She has literally fought with him to have her home as one that was intolerant to the ill effects of smoking.

Decision on Buying a Home

After her marriage, Mrs. H initially stayed in the home of her parents along with her husband. This wasn’t the most optimal arrangement as social norms meant that husbands don’t stay at the home of their wives. This coupled with the need for independence is why Mrs. H and her husband looked at staying in an independent home owned by them. Moreover Mrs. H’s husband’s parents pushed for then living in an independent home.

The decision to buy their own home was collective in the sense it involved both her and her husband. The land that was acquired, the design for the home was again collective decisions. The architecture to the home incorporated the requirements Mrs. H put forward. Once the home was ready, Mrs. H’s parents moved in with them. Currently Mrs. H and her family live on the top floor with her parents living on the ground floor. Such a segregation Mrs. H felt gave each of them a sense of their own personal space whilst keeping them together.

I am glad me and my husband did the house together. After all, this was a lifetime kind of buy. Our home is a place we will be more often than any other. I wanted to ensure both of us felt good about the home we were building together. I am also happy we were able to combine our collective presence with personal spaces. That was important to me.

Mrs. H making an assessment of the family life that she's lived this far feels she has had a fulfilling one. She is at a certain sense of "peace" with her family though there could still be a few things that could make it better. She believes over time she will be able to influence things at home for the better.

Limitations

Since the study was designed in a manner where there were multiple sittings over a specified period of time it is possible some significant decision events are not covered as they may not be available for articulation from the participant's long term memory. This limitation determined the restricted purposive selection of only one female participant. Hence, the generalization of results for the wider context should be applied only where similar situations prevail. Though every care is taken to collect and interpret the relevant information, there could be some distortion in the interpretation of the responses. Such distortions were minimized by the researchers analyzing the available data independently before coming together to discuss the same. The opinion of the respondent also may not be free from individual biases and prejudices. To a large extent, this research is more exploratory than definitive; therefore, there has been a greater concentration on the theoretical importance than on the statistical significance of the findings.

In using the methodology of phenomenological analysis, the requisite focus was provided to ensure there were articulations of decision experiences by the participants. Though the research required that there be specific assessments of articulations of such experiences across decision contexts it was ensured there weren't any explicit seeking of contextual decision experiences from participants. Instead the researchers let the articulation take its natural flow, intervening only when it was required so as to encourage further articulation.

At times the dialogue was gently steered such that there be conversations on decision areas that were relevant to the decision contexts that were being studied.

Conclusions

The objective of the research was to study "woman as decision-makers" in the "home" context. "Home" is considered as the territory of women and their decision making in this context would be interesting to study, particularly in the background of the research literature that suggests that men dominate decision making in general. The findings of the study on one hand show that women generally need to get their decisions ratified by husband or parents regarding their choice of career, regarding children, purchase decisions etc. However, at the same time women also tries to defend her "turf" by ensuring that such decisions do not poorly affect her "home." Hence, she always tries to balance her decisions with the need for approval or ratification. The balancing act is often difficult as many times it is between what is rational and what is not or what is right and what is not and many times women may have to sacrifice her interests in the interest of her children and home.

An across decision context analysis shows the prevalence of a similar method to decision making. The context in itself drove part of the method used, and the other part was held as consistent, based on the decision-making psyche at play. There has been no marked

variance in approaches across decision contexts for Mrs. H. Every context saw here searching for the attainment of certain balance that held between what was logical and rational, and what wasn't.

In the choice of her mate, Mrs. H achieved the balance between what her parents believed in, and what her rational thought process told her. She was able to marry the person she wanted, and she had not alienated her parents despite their reluctance. In the choice of a career Mrs. H has been firm enough to pursue what she had wanted. Success both in her field of study and at her career has meant that her significant others approve of the career decisions she has made.

In raising her children, Mrs. H has proven to be both a nurturer and a protector. Whilst she would do everything to help her daughters soar in their inherent capabilities, she would also be astute in diffusing tensions that could adversely affect her daughter's psyche. The goal for her was twofold. Keep her daughters sense of self-worth intact and help leverage their inherent talents. Again, the balance here was to have her daughter's do their father's bidding, and yet not have it damage her children's sense of self-esteem and worth. Balance also meant taking to conflicts to preserve what was good for the family.

In a building a home for the family to live in, Mrs. H has found a balance between personal space and bonding. The success at this can be attributed to the fact there have been no conflicts between her parents and her husband. Moreover, her parents have been active participants in raising her children and tending for her home. An across context analysis of decision contexts illustrates the acute incidence of a need for "balance" as an outcome to decisions Mrs. H has had to make. There haven't been swings either to acute need for logic, or a reliance of what she felt as emotions.

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