

The Role of Women's Autonomy in Shaping Household Decisions: Insights from Rural Rajasthan"

***Dr. Manoj Kumar Saini**

Abstract

This study looks at how women participate in household decision-making in Rajasthan, India's rural Jaipur Division. It investigates how socioeconomic and cultural elements affect women's participation in decision-making in five chosen communities. The study emphasises that although women's independence and participation in decision-making are increasing as a result of things like economic empowerment and education, there are still major obstacles because of deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions. According to the survey, women's engagement varies according to social groups, occupation types, education levels, and family leadership. Notwithstanding advancements, the results indicate that specific initiatives are required to improve gender equality and provide women in rural households more influence. According to the study's findings, creating equal and productive home dynamics requires advancing economic possibilities, education, and the questioning of conventional gender stereotypes.

Keywords: women decision-making, rural Jaipur, socioeconomic factors, patriarchal traditions, women's empowerment, household autonomy, gender equality.

Introduction

The idea of women participating in home decision-making touches on issues of independence, empowerment, and social factors. Batliwala defines empowerment as having authority over resources and choices. In essence, it describes how women influence and decide on family issues like money management, education, healthcare, and general well-being. This involvement can range from actively participating and making decisions to taking on more passive roles with little influence or power. Women have historically been confined to household duties and have had their freedom restricted by traditional gender roles in cultures. However, while not in every situation, shifting economic conditions and initiatives to advance gender equality have brought about changes in these dynamics.

Numerous factors, including as cultural norms, socioeconomic status, education levels, utilisation of resources, and legal frameworks, affect how often women participate in household decision-making. Societies with patriarchal institutions frequently maintain uneven power relations by marginalising women and limiting their influence over significant family issues to those of carers and homemakers.

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In these situations, male household members make the majority of the decisions about money, education for kids, healthcare, and even reproduction, which perpetuates inequality and traditional gender roles.

A complex interaction of sociocultural, political, and economic variables affects women's involvement in household decision-making in Rajasthan's rural Jaipur Division. Due to ingrained patriarchal beliefs and traditional gender roles, women still face several challenges, despite improvements in their autonomy and empowerment. Initiatives to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women must not only address these structural barriers but also foster a culture that values and respects women's agency and voices both within the family and in society at large.

The situation regarding women's involvement in domestic decision-making has changed significantly in recent years. Women, who have historically been marginalised and restricted to roles that are mostly found in the home, are now more assertively influencing the dynamics of their households. Numerous socioeconomic variables, changing cultural standards, and improvements in knowledge and education are the main drivers of this change.

The crucial contributions women contribute to the general prosperity and well-being of households are becoming increasingly acknowledged in many areas. Their responsibilities go beyond providing traditional care; they also include making decisions about family planning, healthcare, education, and finances. This change represents a profound reorganisation of power dynamics inside households and is not just symbolic. India ranks 108th out of 193 nations with a score of 0.437 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measures gender disparities in the areas of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. India's GII ranking has continuously improved over the past ten years, demonstrating the nation's progress towards gender equality.

Globally, women's increasing educational attainment is a major driver of this shift. Women are better equipped to actively participate in processes of decision-making as more of them have access to education. Women who have received an education are better equipped to question gender norms and fight for their rights within the family.

Furthermore, improving women's agency in households is mostly dependent on economic empowerment. Women are in a better position to voice their objectives and preferences in decision-making because they have more access to financial resources and career prospects. They have the freedom to make decisions that suit their goals and interests when they are economically independent.

The terrain of women's involvement in household decision-making is also altering as a result of cultural changes and shifting societal conventions. More attempts are being made to eliminate patriarchal systems that limit women's agency as gender equality is increasingly acknowledged as a basic human right. As movements for gender equality and women's rights have gained traction,

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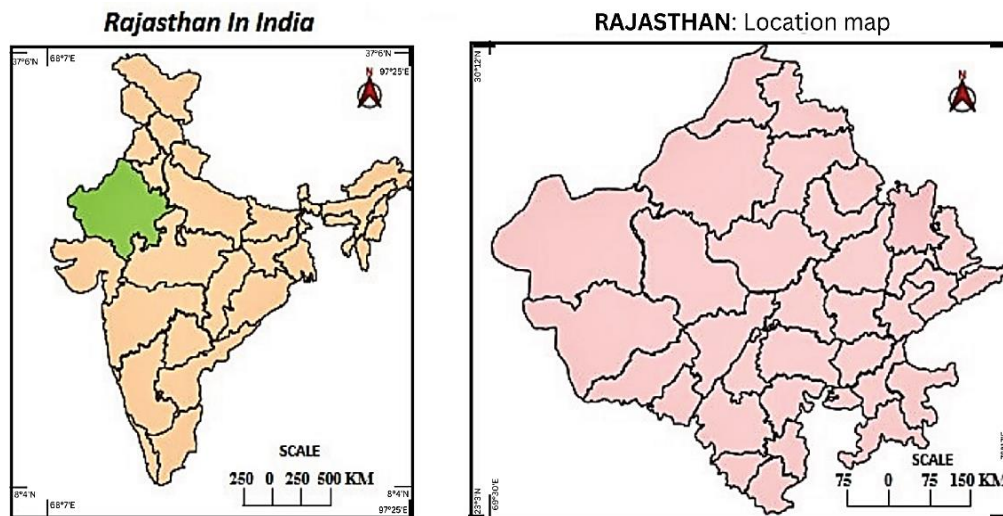
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communities and authorities are being prompted to confront structural obstacles to women's empowerment.

Education, economic empowerment, and changing cultural norms are some of the causes driving a substantial transformation in women's participation in household decision-making in Jaipur, Rajasthan's rural division. Even though there has been progress, much more has to be done to guarantee complete gender equality and give women the ability to actively participate in decisions made in their homes and communities.

Study Area; Rajasthan

Present Rajasthan was formed on 1 November 1956. According to 2011 Census the Population of Rajasthan is 6,85,48,437 (8th in country). The Geographical area of the state is 3,42,239 sq. km. in which 76.12% (26099974 Hectare in 2020-21) of total area is under gross cropped Area and only 33.99% (11655227 Hectare) area is under gross irrigated area. The shape of state is Quadrilateral. located between 23°03' North to 30°12' North latitude and 69°30' East to 78°17' East longitude with the tropic of cancer passing through its Southernmost district Banswara. Rajasthan Shares a 1070 Km. long international boundary ('Radcliffe line') with Pakistan. Ganganagar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer & Barmer districts shares the international boundary. The Total population of Rajasthan according to 2011 census is 6,85,48,437 persons, in which 24.89% is Urban and 75.11% Rural. Total Rural population is 5,15,00,352 persons (Males 2,66,41,747 and Females 2,48,58,605).



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Objectives

1. To analyze the socioeconomic profile of households in rural Jaipur Division.
2. To assess the extent of women's decision-making authority in these households.
3. To identify the key factors influencing women's autonomy in household decisions.
4. To propose targeted interventions to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Data and Methodology

To accomplish the goals of the current study, primary sources were used. Using a questionnaire, primary data and first-hand knowledge were gathered from a subset of homes in Rajasthan's rural Jaipur division. A multistage method of random sampling has been employed to gather primary data. The five districts of Rajasthan's Jaipur division—Jaipur, Dausa, Sikar, Jhunjhunu, and Alwar—are all included in the study. In the initial stage, one village was chosen from each of the Jaipur division's five districts, for a total of five villages chosen. In the end, 40 homes were chosen at random from each community. This comprises a sample of 200 households in total.

Statistical analysis: Using MS-EXCEL, statistical tools of percentages and measures of central tendency were employed to investigate the extent of women's influence in household decision-making in Jaipur, Rajasthan's rural division.

Literature Review

Economic Factors: Studies have shown that women's economic empowerment significantly enhances their decision-making power within households. Higher income levels and access to financial resources enable women to assert their preferences and contribute to family decisions (Kapila et al., 2016). In Punjab, microfinance programs have been instrumental in empowering rural women (Kapila et al., 2016).

Cultural Norms: Cultural norms and patriarchal systems often limit women's agency. However, recent movements for gender equality are challenging these traditions, leading to gradual shifts in power dynamics (Titus et al., 2017). In Tamil Nadu, women exhibit greater autonomy in healthcare and financial decisions compared to those in Uttar Pradesh (Roy & Niranjana, 2005).

Education: Education is a key driver of women's empowerment. Higher education levels enable women to question gender norms and advocate for their rights within the family (Kajal, 2022). In Jaipur, women's participation in agricultural self-help groups (SHGs) has increased their decision-making power (Surendran et al., 2023).

Analysis and Discoveries

First, the socioeconomic characteristics of sample households are determined as a percentage and reported in Table 1.

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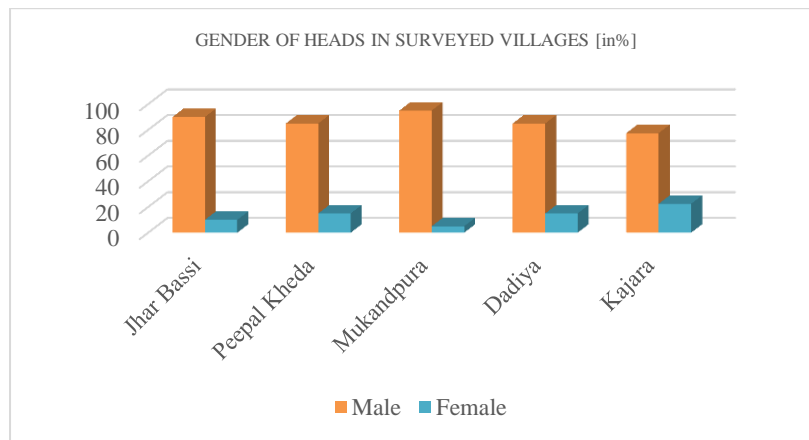
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Table 1: Socio-economic profile of the respondent's household

Sr. No.	Characteristics		No. of Household				
			Jhar Bassi (%)	Peepalkheda (%)	Mukandpura (%)	Dadiya (%)	Kajra (%)
1	Gender of head	Male	90	85	95	85	77.5
		Female	10	15	5	15	22.5
2	Social Category	General	32.5	50	25	20	38.6
		SC	27.5	20	40	15	11.4
		ST	30	0	25	10	9.1
		OBC	10	30	10	55	40.9
3	Level of Education of Head of the household	Illiterate	7.5	30	15	7.5	12.5
		Primary	20	17.5	27.5	25	20
		Secondary	20	15	17.5	22.5	17.5
		sr. secondary	17.5	17.5	15	17.5	15
		Graduation	22.5	7.5	15	15	10
		Post Graduation	10	12.5	10	12.5	20
		above	2.5	0	0	0	5
4	Nature of Employment of Head of the household	Formal	42.5	25	30	37.5	35
		Informal	50	60	50	52.5	57.5
		Unemployed	7.5	15	20	10	7.5

Source: Primary data collected by author

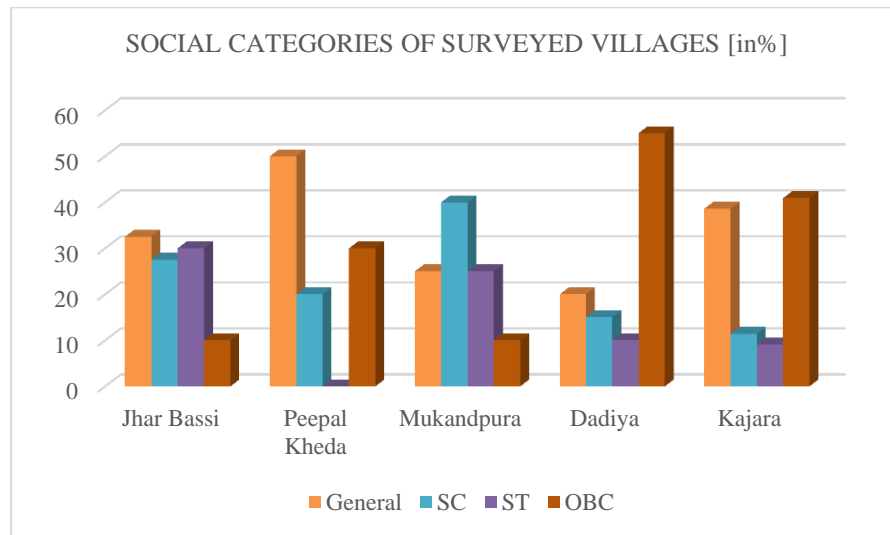
The table offers a thorough examination of the different household attributes in the five villages of Dadiya, Kajra, Mukandpura, Peepalkheda, and Jhar Bassi. Every attribute is divided into distinct groups, and the proportion of households that fall into each group is shown.



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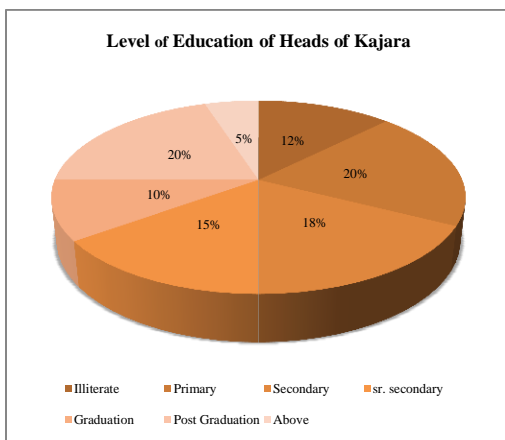
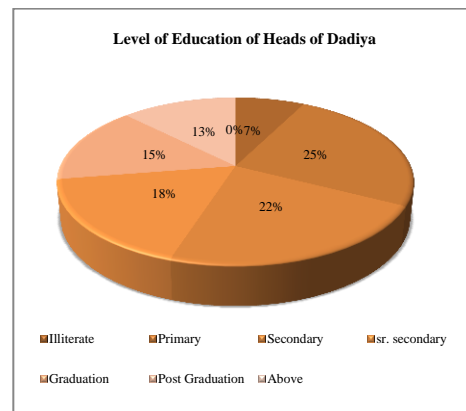
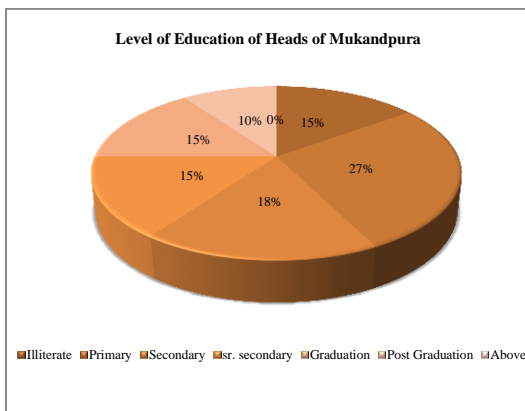
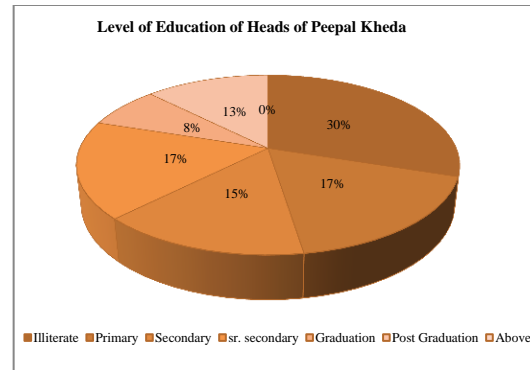
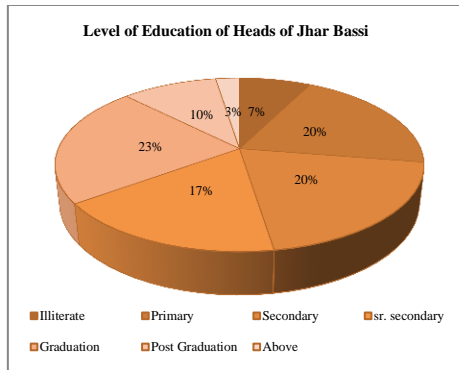
First of all, there is a noticeable pattern in the gender of the ruler of home throughout all villages, with men leading the majority of houses. With 95% of families led by men, Mukandpura has the greatest percentage, whereas Kajra has the lowest at 77.5%. On the other hand, Mukandpura has the lowest percentage of female-headed families (5%), while Kajra has the highest percentage (22.5%).



Second, the villages differ greatly in how homes are distributed across various social categories. With 50% of houses falling into the general group, Peepalkheda has the highest percentage, while Dadiya has the lowest at 20%. With 40% of homes belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Mukandpura has the greatest percentage, while Kajra has the lowest at 11.4%. While Peepalkheda has no Scheduled Tribes (ST), Jhar Bassi has a sizable 30% ST population. At 55%, Dadiya has the largest percentage of Other Backward Classes (OBC), while Mukandpura and Jhar Bassi have the lowest percentages at 10% each.

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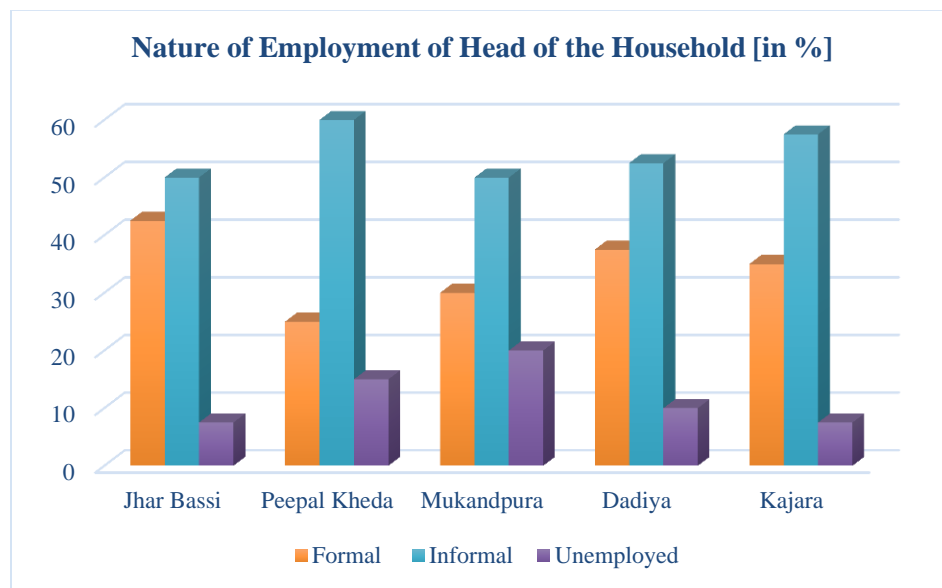
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Thirdly, there are a variety of trends in the educational backgrounds of household heads. Dadiya and Jhar Bassi have the lowest percentages of illiterate household heads (7.5% apiece), while Peepalkheda has the highest at 30%. Jhar Bassi has the lowest percentage of household heads with a high school diploma (20%), while Mukandpura has the highest at 27.5%. In secondary school, comparable patterns are seen, with Peepalkheda having the lowest percentage at 15% and Mukandpura and Kajra both at 17.5%. Mukandpura has the lowest percentage of household heads with senior secondary school education (15%), followed by Jhar Bassi (17.5%) and Peepalkheda (15%). Peepalkheda has the lowest graduation rate at 7.5%, while Jhar Bassi has the highest at 22.5%. Kajra has the highest post-graduation rate (20%), followed by Mukandpura and Jhar Bassi (10%). Only Kajra (5%) and Jhar Bassi (2.5%) report any households with more than a post-graduation level of education.



Finally, there are differences in the type of work that the household head does. Jhar Bassi has the highest percentage of formal employment (42.5%), while Peepalkheda has the lowest (25%). While Jhar Bassi and Mukandpura have 50% informal employment, Peepalkheda has 60% and Kajra has 57.5%. Compared to Kajra and Jhar Bassi, where unemployment rates are 7.5% and 20%, respectively, Peepalkheda and Mukandpura have higher unemployment rates at 15% and 20%.

By highlighting the differences in household characteristics among the five villages, this research sheds light on the distribution of genders, social categories, educational attainment, and job status of the family heads.

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Table 2: Degree of women in household decision making power

Sr. No.	Characteristics		No. of Household				
			Jhar Bassi (%)	Peepalkheda (%)	Mukandpura (%)	Dadiya (%)	Kajra (%)
1	Main occupation of women	Housewife	47.5	60	45	77.5	37.5
		Agricultural worker	40	10	45	7.5	42.5
		Self-employed	0	2.5	2.5	5	0
		Daily wage Worker	10	25	5	2.5	20
		Govt Job	2.5	2.5	2.5	7.5	0
2	Decision taken by whom about women's work	Head of HH	20	25	5	25	27.5
		Husband	40	10	5	30	17.5
		By Herself	40	40	62.5	32.5	47.5
		All Family	0	25	27.5	12.5	7.5
3	Decision taken by whom about use of money that women earned	Head of HH	25	40	10	22.5	40
		Husband	40	10	15	30	22.5
		By Herself	30	22.5	47.5	27.5	30
		All Family	5	27.5	27.5	20	7.5
4	Bank account of women	No one	5	7.5	2.5	2.5	0
		All	95	92.5	97.5	97.5	100
		Someone	0	0	0	0	0
5	Decision taken by whom about treatment of women	Head of HH	20	20	2.5	12.5	10
		Husband	50	20	65	65	72.5
		By Herself	30	30	2.5	2.5	10
		All Family	0	30	30	20	7.5
6	Women allowed to go to market	No	0	0	0	2.5	0
		Yes	100	100	100	97.5	100
7	Women allowed to study outside area/ state	No	80	67.5	80	85	82.5
		Yes	20	32.5	20	15	17.5
8	Women allowed to take consumption decisions	No	7.5	12.5	10	0	2.5
		Yes	92.5	87.5	90	100	97.5
9	Women allowed to attend classes through online mode during COVID-19	No	40	45	25	57.5	55
		Yes	60	55	75	42.5	45

Source: Primary data collected by author.

A thorough comparison of several attributes among the five villages—Jhar Bassi, Peepalkheda, Mukandpura, Dadiya, and Kajra—is shown in this table. Women's primary occupation, their ability to make decisions about many facets of their lives, and their access to specific liberties and resources are some of these traits.

The majority of women in all villages work as housewives, with Dadiya and Peepalkheda having the highest percentages at 77.5% and 60%, respectively. Another common occupation is agriculture, especially in Jhar Bassi (40%) Mukandpura (45%), and Kajra (42.5%). The least prevalent occupation, with extremely low percentages in every village, is self-employment. Compared to other villages, Peepalkheda (25%) and Kajra (20%) have higher rates of daily wage labour. Government employment is very low, with Dadiya having the greatest percentage (7.5%).

There is a great deal of variance in the decisions made regarding women's job. The key decision-maker in Dadiya (25%), and Kajra (27.5%), is the head of the household. In Dadiya (30%) and Jhar Bassi (40%), husbands play a major role. The highest levels of autonomy are held by women in Jhar Bassi (40%) and Mukandpura (62.5%). In Peepalkheda, family participation in decision-making has the most impact (25%).

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In Kajra (40%) and Peepalkheda (40%), the head of the home has the most decision-making power when it comes to how women's earned money is used. In Dadiya (30%) and Jhar Bassi (40%) husbands play a significant role in decision-making. In Mukandpura, women enjoy the highest level of autonomy (47.5%). Peepalkheda (27.5%) and Mukandpura (27.5%) have substantial rates of family engagement in financial decisions.

Nearly universal access to bank accounts is noted, with Kajra having the highest number (100%). The largest percentage of women without bank accounts (7.5%) is seen in Peepalkheda.

In Jhar Bassi (20%) and Peepalkheda (20%), the head of the home has the most influence over decisions on how women are treated. In Dadiya (65%) and Kajra (72.5%), husbands are the majority. The majority of decision-making authority in Peepalkheda (30%) and Jhar Bassi (30%) is held by women. Significant family participation in treatment choices is observed in Mukandpura (30%) and Peepalkheda (30%).

With very little restrictions, practically all women are permitted to visit the market; the largest percentage is found in Dadiya (2.5%). Regarding educational chances, women are not allowed to study outside of their state or territory; the largest restrictions are seen in Dadiya (85%) and Kajra (82.5%). The largest percentage of women permitted to study outside is seen in Peepalkheda (32.5%).

The percentage of women who make their own consumption decisions is exceptionally high, particularly in Dadiya (100%) and Kajra (97.5%). The percentage of women who are not permitted to make decisions about their consumption is largest in Peepalkheda (12.5%), but only a small number of villages exhibit any notable restrictions. Finally, the outcomes of women's access to online learning during COVID-19 are not entirely consistent. While Mukandpura has the largest percentage of women permitted to attend online programs (75%), Dadiya and Kajra have the highest limitations (57.5%) and 55%, respectively.

In conclusion, the majority of women in these areas are employed as housewives or in agriculture. Although there is a wide range of decision-making authority, many women have autonomy, particularly when it comes to their financial and professional affairs. Almost everyone has access to a bank account. Although there are few educational options outside of the neighbourhood, practically all women are permitted to attend the market. In general, women enjoy a great deal of liberty when it comes to choosing what to buy. Some towns had limited access to internet schooling during COVID-19. The socioeconomic and cultural differences influencing women's roles and autonomy in various villages are highlighted in this table.

In brief

The study offers a thorough summary of household traits and women's involvement in decision-making in five villages—Jhar Bassi, Peepalkheda, Mukandpura, Dadiya, and Kajra—in Rajasthan's rural Jaipur Division. The majority of homes are headed by men, according to the data; Mukandpura has the greatest rate at 95%, while Kajra has the lowest at 77.5%. Social classifications differ; Dadiya

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has the lowest percentage of general category homes (20%), while Peepalkheda has the greatest at 50%. There is a notable disparity in the educational attainment of household heads, with Jhar Bassi having the largest percentage of graduates (22.5%) and Peepalkheda having the highest percentage of illiterate heads (30%). Formal employment is most prevalent in Jhar Bassi (42.5%), whereas informal employment is most prevalent in Peepalkheda (60%).

The majority of women in Dadiya (77.5%) and Peepalkheda (60%), in particular, are housewives. Additionally important is agricultural labour, especially in Mukandpura (45%) and Kajra (42.5%). In Mukandpura, women enjoy the most autonomy when it comes to making decisions about their jobs and finances (62.5% for employment choices and 47.5% for financial decisions). With Kajra at 100%, bank account access is almost widespread. Women have little barriers to market access, but there are few options for education outside of their community, particularly in Dadiya (85%) and Kajra (82.5%). While there were differences in access to online learning during COVID-19, Mukandpura had the most allocation (75%).

Conclusion

A complex and diverse landscape influenced by numerous socioeconomic and cultural elements is revealed by the study on the involvement of women in making household decisions across five villages in the Rural Jaipur Division. The following are the main inferences made from the data:

1. Leadership in the Home and Gender: Males head most homes in the research, while there are significant geographical differences. The proportion of homes headed by women is highest in Kajra, whereas the percentage of households headed by men is highest in Mukandpura. This variance is a reflection of the villages' diverse cultural perspectives on gender roles.

2. Social Groups and Education: The breakdown of families by social group, including general, Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and OBCs—other backward classes—vary greatly. There are also notable differences in the educational attainment of household heads. The highest rates of illiteracy are found in Peepalkheda, although Jhar Bassi leads in both graduation and post-graduate. Women's access to resources and involvement in decision-making processes are probably going to be impacted by these educational disparities.

3. Employment and Economic Participation: Household heads' employment patterns show a combination of formal and informal labour, with significant variations between villages. While informal employment and unemployment rates are greater in Peepalkheda and Kajra, formal employment rates are higher in Jhar Bassi. Women's financial autonomy and decision-making power in the home are impacted by this economic disparity.

4. Decision-Making Power: There are significant differences in women's decision-making power. In many communities, women have considerable control over their jobs and finances, but in others, male household heads or husbands make most of the choices. While Kajra and Dadiya exhibit more conventional patterns of male making choices domination, Mukandpura and Jhar Bassi stand out for having greater female autonomy.

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5. Access to Resources and possibilities: While almost everyone has access to bank accounts, Dadiya and Kajra have considerable limitations on their ability to pursue outside educational possibilities. Although market accessibility and online learning opportunities during COVID-19 differ, women's autonomy in consuming decisions is high in the majority of communities, highlighting larger problems with resource access and adaptation to technology.

6. In general, the results emphasise the necessity of customised treatments that target particular regional issues. Along with initiatives to question conventional gender norms, promoting economic and educational opportunities can increase women's involvement in decision-making and lead to more equal and productive dynamics in the home and community.

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