

Measuring Women's and Girls' Empowerment

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Empowerment & Agency

Empowerment

"the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability."

-Naila Kabeer, 1999

Agency

"someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives."

-Amartya Sen, 1999



Measuring empowerment is particularly “tricky”

1. It's about meaningful choice, but we rarely observe decision-making directly
2. Empowerment is a process
3. Many aspects of empowerment are susceptible to reporting bias
4. Empowerment means different things in different contexts, but we may also want to compare across contexts
5. Prioritizing outcome measures is difficult
6. Measuring women's preferences is challenging in contexts where women have internalized society's views
7. Disempowerment can heighten data collection challenges

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About the guide

- Designed to support the work of M&E practitioners, researchers, and students
- Draws on diverse disciplines and experiences of J-PAL affiliated professors
- Doesn't offer ready-to-go survey instruments
- Instead, a process for developing indicators appropriate to each study along with extensive examples
- Tips for overcoming common challenges
- Catalogue of survey modules and non-survey instruments



Photo: Paul Smith | J-PAL/IPA

How can we build a reliable strategy for measuring empowerment?

Step 1. Formative research: to understand gender and empowerment in the context

Step 2. Map theory of change to outcomes and indicators

Step 3. Develop and validate data instruments that minimize reporting bias

Step 4. Data collection plan: design a data collection plan that minimizes measurement error



Photo: Paul Smith | J-PAL/PA



**Some key lessons I've learned in measuring empowerment in Bangladesh
(With Nina Buchmann, Erica Field, Shahana Nazneen & Iman Sen)**

Photo: Talitha Chairunissa | J-PAL

Good measurement depends on understanding context: formative research is critical and should be sustained throughout

What formative research can help us do	Example from our evaluation on girls' empowerment Bangladesh
Understanding how women's and girls' choices are constrained in a particular context	Girls' mobility constrained not based on distance, but what they're doing and for whom
Generating theory of change and hypotheses about how a program could work	Marriage offers are infrequent, like a market with search costs. Program effects could extend beyond life of program
Identify what language to use in survey questions	Asking about dowry when dowry is illegal. Hitting vs slapping in domestic abuse.
Identify who has what information	Daughters move away, but their moms know daughter's age at first childbirth

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Most measures of decision-making are inherently limited. Combining them can paint a richer picture.

Combine one or more of the following approaches:

- Ask people about specific decision-making processes.
- For joint decisions, ask more than one person about the decision-making process.
- Measure women's and men's preferences at baseline and track whether outcomes move in the direction of women's preferences after the program.
- Measure the psychological components of agency: women's ability to set goals in line with what they value and act on them.
- Try to observe a choice directory or create a situation in which you can observe a choice.
- Measure fundamental outcomes related to well-being.



Specific decisions vs. decision-making in general

General question (DHS)	
Who usually makes decisions about health care for yourself: you, your (husband/partner), you and your (husband/partner) jointly, or someone else?	RESPONDENT 1 HUSBAND/PARTNER 2 RESPONDENT AND HUSBAND/PARTNER JOINTLY 3 SOMEONE ELSE 4 OTHER 6
More specific question covering same concept	
If your child is sick and needs immediate health care, but your husband is not home, what would you do?	1=Take the child to a doctor/health center right away 2=Wait for my husband to return 3=Go to my in-laws 4=Talk to my husband first 5=Take help from relatives/neighbors 6=Do not have children 96=Other
If you ever needed medicine (e.g. for headache, menstrual cramps etc.), who would purchase it?	Self=1 Husband=2 Parents=3 Siblings=4 In laws=5 Neighbor/relative/friend=6 Others=96
Do you think you can go and buy it yourself?	Yes=1 No=2 Sometimes=3

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Non-survey instruments can address social desirability bias

- Observing what people do not want to say
 - Less prone to reporting bias and recall error
 - Reveals attitudes people may be unaware of
- Example: community driven development in Sierra Leone
 - Offered community choice of gift
 - Record whether women speak up and are included/excluded from decision-making



Photo: Gieltje Adriaans | IPA

Nonsurvey instruments useful for measuring women's empowerment

- Experimental Vignettes
- Games
- Direct observation, structured community activities
- Physical tests/biomarkers
 - Height and weight
 - Measures of stress
- Purchase decisions



Experimental vignettes: measuring bias against women leaders



Participants were randomly assigned to hear a recorded speech by either a man or a woman.

They then rated the leaders' performance.

(Beaman et al. 2009)

Structured community activity



Communities brought together
community meeting

Enumerators offered a choice of
gift to thank them for
participating in survey

Enumerators stood back and
recorded how decision was
made

Casey, Glennerster and Miguel,
2012

Photo credit: Glenna Gordon

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Table 4.8: Main outcomes (uncensored), unmarried girls age 15-17 at program launch

	Health			Empowerment			IGA		
	Age 10-17 (1)	Age 15-17 (2)	Age 15 (3)	Age 10-17 (4)	Age 15-17 (5)	Age 15 (6)	Age 10-17 (7)	Age 15-17 (8)	Age 15 (9)
Empow.	0.025 (0.048)	0.008 (0.079)	0.092 (0.110)	0.061* (0.036)	0.070 (0.074)	0.002 (0.106)	0.059 (0.068)	0.382*** (0.133)	0.459*** (0.159)
Incentive	-0.054 (0.036)	-0.032 (0.085)	-0.134 (0.122)	-0.012 (0.021)	-0.054 (0.043)	-0.095 (0.067)	-0.043 (0.047)	0.155 (0.128)	-0.040 (0.173)
Incen.*Empow.	0.056 (0.073)	0.063 (0.147)	0.168 (0.198)	-0.038 (0.052)	0.036 (0.094)	0.067 (0.132)	0.015 (0.101)	-0.358 (0.235)	-0.040 (0.297)
Control Mean	0.00024	0.00162	0.01418	-0.00728	-0.00104	0.01179	0.04395	0.04135	-0.00225
Observations	5002	1558	683	5013	1561	685	5007	1560	684
FE	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union

2SLS regressions with modified Huber-White SEs clustered at the community level and adjusted for stratification and baseline characteristics.

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Table 4.12: Empowerment outcomes, unmarried girls age 10-17 at program launch

Uncensored variables only				
	EMPOWERMENT	Empowerment	Gender Att.	Mobility
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Empow.	0.053*	0.061*	0.093**	-0.063
	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.041)	(0.052)
Incentive	-0.019	-0.012	0.008	-0.087**
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.035)
Incen.*Empow.	-0.028	-0.038	-0.085	0.151**
	(0.045)	(0.052)	(0.063)	(0.075)
Control Mean	0.00906	-0.00728	-0.00469	-0.09052
Observations	5013	5013	5013	4989
FE	Union	Union	Union	Union

Table 4.12: Empowerment outcomes, unmarried girls age 10-17 at program launch

All variables									
	Gender Att.	Mobility	Contraception	Decision-making	Girl Health Dec.	Marriage Dec.	Dress Dec.	Economic Dec.	Reprod. Health Dec.
	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Empow.	0.056	-0.058	0.001	0.059	0.066	0.051	0.051	0.047	0.150
	(0.044)	(0.052)	(0.046)	(0.041)	(0.079)	(0.058)	(0.065)	(0.056)	(0.114)
Incentive	-0.017	-0.068*	-0.000	0.007	-0.075	0.051	-0.010	-0.041	0.210**
	(0.029)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.026)	(0.051)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.041)	(0.093)
Incen.*Empow.	-0.054	0.133*	-0.048	-0.052	0.087	-0.125	0.100	-0.003	-0.371**
	(0.067)	(0.074)	(0.075)	(0.057)	(0.110)	(0.089)	(0.102)	(0.081)	(0.184)
Control Mean	0.00547	-0.05744	0.48862	-0.00211	-0.00697	0.00354	-0.00008	-0.00029	-0.00000
Observations	5013	4989	3327	3674	3523	3658	3556	3556	2539
FE	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union	Union

Conclusion

- Women's empowerment is hard but not impossible to measure well
- Important to understand what aspects of their lives that, locally, women:
 - have limited ability to influence
 - Want to change and/or could be meaningful to change
- [and important to ask] Which of these does the program or policy being evaluated actually have the potential to change
- Investigate which of our topic areas are prone to social desirability bias (locally)
- Measure the process of empowerment by tracking: resources, agency, outcomes/achievements
- Complement standardized indicators with context-specific ones
- Consider using non-survey instruments in addition to surveys

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