

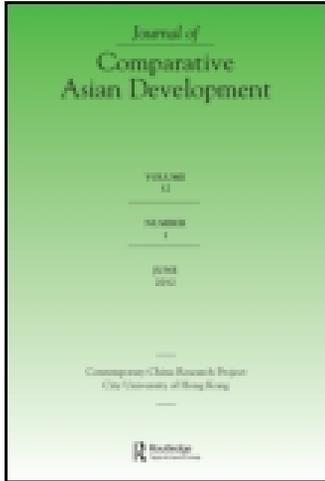
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Household-level Analysis of Women's Power Practice in Old Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study examines the extent of women's power in Old Dhaka City and determines the influential factors behind their practice of power. One finding is that the women in this city are moderately empowered, as indicated by the 5D Women's Power Index (WPI). The indices of self-worth with regard to decision making, decision-making opportunity, and ability to control and regulate one's own life show good performance, whereas the aspects of mobility and access to resources show moderate performance. The women in Old Dhaka have aspirations in life and confidence in their abilities. The logistic regression shows that educational attainment, age at the time of marriage of women and the husband-to-wife age gap positively affect the WPI at the 5% level of significance, whereas the income of women affects the WPI at the 10% level. However, the educational attainment of husbands and the existence of traditional socio-cultural norms have no effect on women's power.

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Keywords: Age at marriage; husband-to-wife age gap; logistic regression; Old Dhaka; self-worth and decision making; Women's Power Index

1. Introduction

Power is an abstract term that has evolved from the cognitive development of human beings. Power arises in a psychological and participatory manner — that is, feelings of empowerment and acting with empowerment, respectively; however, feelings of empowerment originate from different social trends and proceed to the participation of all groups in society (Mason & Smith, 2003). Empowerment involves personal strengthening and enhancement of life opportunities, as well as collective participation in efforts derived from different forms of power practice, such as power over, to, with and within (Williams, Seed, & Mwau, 1994, p. 233), to achieve equality of opportunity and equity among various groups (Sahay, 1998, p. 10). The ability to make choices is the primary requirement of empowerment (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005; Kabeer, 1999). The pillars of empowerment may be social reform, removal of social barriers, building of social capital, service delivery and many other elements from national and group perspectives (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005; Grootaert, 2003). Empowerment encompasses various items, such as resource, rights and obligations (Mason & Smith, 2003), that can be changed with the change of place, time and thought.

Progress in empowerment cannot be measured in terms of any definite scale, but can be conceived from different indicators of power practice in contemporary situations or over a certain period. Situational and/or temporal indicators can be observed, realized and measured to determine the power practice from which the facts of women's empowerment can be identified. No firm definition and formula for gauging empowerment exists. Women's empowerment is perceived, conceptualized and framed from different psychological, social and economic standpoints of development institutions and feminist specialists. Empowerment evolves from individual perception and the opportunity and varies depending on different attitudes, such as those of family, community, locality and nation. The conditional variation of dimensions and indicators of women's practice of power calls for close examination of actual situations. Women's empowerment is a special aspect of empowerment that deals with women, and a number of studies (Folbre, 2006; Nath, 2009; Revenga & Shetty, 2012)

and organizations concentrate on gender equality as a requirement for women's empowerment. Women's empowerment means something more than gender equality. Women's lack of empowerment indicates that the functioning of women from the personal to the international level may be hindered by men, other women, current and traditional cultures as well as dogmatic beliefs. This study focuses on active factors, including gender issues that hinder women's empowerment at the household level.

Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority South Asian country and is historically dominated by males, but nowadays men wield less control over the lives of women. Dhaka is the capital city of Bangladesh, and the Old Dhaka region is the ancient part of this capital city. Old Dhaka was established as the national capital during the 17th-century Mughal period. Following British and Pakistani rule, modern Dhaka was developed as the capital city of Bangladesh when the country gained independence in 1971. The experience of Dhaka is traceable to a Western country (Britain) and other Asian countries (India and Pakistan). The fast-growing Dhaka has turned into a megacity. It is one of the members of the C40 Megacities to propose common projects, collective actions and innovative solutions for sustainable development (URAMET, 2013). The economic performance of Dhaka affects other countries through direct economic transactions or the demonstration effect, as Bangladesh has been an open economy since the early 1990s. The culture of Dhaka affects other countries and vice versa through international migration and virtually open electronic and online media sectors. The empowerment of women in Old Dhaka is supposed to affect cultural adaptation and development. The diversified performance of women in Dhaka can be a symbol of female progress even in a Muslim-majority country.

Considerable research on women's empowerment and the influential factors of women's empowerment have been conducted in various rural areas of Bangladesh but not in Dhaka. Being the capital city of Bangladesh, and one of the largest cities in the world, Dhaka influences the overall culture and development of Bangladesh and even that of other countries through migration. The original Dhaka is approximately 400 years old, and the city is being extended. The lifestyle (that is, language, culture and educational attainment) seem different between old and extended Dhaka, as well as between Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh. Women experience auspicious conditions in Old Dhaka, but their educational status and life vision are not as high as in other parts of Dhaka City or other developed cities in the world. The diverse lifestyle in Dhaka City is

the key point in the study of the situation of women in Old Dhaka. This study therefore focuses on the condition of women's empowerment and the factors that affect women's practice of power in Old Dhaka.

In this paper, the people of Old Dhaka refers to the residents of Old Dhaka regardless of their origin of birth. This study considers the conditions of women only in Old Dhaka and not in their places of origin. A survey was conducted in Old Dhaka to accomplish our research objective. Research delves deeply into circumstances, but true actualization starts from individual participation. Family is the first and best place for women's power to be granted and practised as an active factor in female empowerment. Thus, this study observes the conditions of married women at the household level to investigate the family-level practice of power in the context of overall empowerment.

In the next section, we determine the framework of the study based on a literature review. The third section is the methodological guide. The fourth section analyses the results of the study, which are discussed in the fifth section. The last section concludes the study and provides recommendations based on the research findings.

2. Framework based on Literature Survey

Dimensions

Women's empowerment is an abstract term. Thus, a clear contextual idea must be formulated and the dimension must be determined to facilitate research. Intellectual literature has been reviewed intensively for this purpose. Several studies consider empowerment as the act of gaining power by previously disempowered sectors of society. Hashemi, Schuler and Riley (1996) determined the following eight variables to measure the power of rural women through microcredit activities in Bangladesh: mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, ability to make large purchases, involvement in major household decisions, relative freedom from domination within the family, political and legal awareness and involvement in political campaigning and protest.

Rowlands (1997) determined three dimensions — personal, relational and collective — within which empowerment operates. The personal dimension involves developing a sense of self-worth and individual confidence and capacity, as well as undoing the effects of internalized oppres-

sion. The relational dimension involves developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it. The collective dimension involves individuals working together to achieve an effect more extensive than each could have achieved alone, including the involvement in political structures with collective action based on cooperation rather than competition.

Kabeer (1999) considered empowerment as the expansion of the ability to make strategic life choices and as a condition determined by three inter-related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. The Longwe framework centres on five levels — equality control, participation, “conscientization”, access and welfare — to increase empowerment (adopted from March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999, p. 93).

Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002) found a nexus of key overlapping terms — options, choice, control and power — in defining women’s empowerment. They synthesized the commonly used six dimensions of women’s empowerment — economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological — for household, community and broader arenas. They found domestic decision making, access to or control over resources and mobility or freedom of movement to be the most frequently used indicators, whereas economic contribution to household, time use or division of domestic labour, freedom from violence, management or knowledge, public space, marriage, kin or social support, couple’s interaction, appreciation in household and sense of self-worth are the less frequently used indicators in individual or household-level empirical studies.

Parveen and Leonhäuser (2004) conceptualized women’s empowerment in three dimensions: socio-economic, familial and psychological; they measured six indicators covering a wide range of attributes to determine the level of women’s empowerment in three villages in the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.

Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) defined empowerment as the possession of capacity to make effective choices that translate into desired actions and outcomes. They considered the agency and opportunity structure associated with the degree of empowerment as measured by assessing whether a person has the opportunity to make a choice, actually uses the opportunity to choose and achieves the desired outcome.

The United Nations Population Information Network considers five components of women’s empowerment: women’s sense of self-worth, their right to have and determine choices, their right to have access to opportunities and resources, their right to control their own lives within

and outside the home and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a just social and economic order nationally and internationally.

We designated the components of women's empowerment which drive women's practice of power towards women's empowerment in Bangladesh. As this study focuses on the household level, only indicators that reflect women's empowerment at this level in Old Dhaka are considered. A number of researchers studying women's empowerment in rural areas have included media exposure and sex of children. However, we have excluded these factors, identified as less influential, because this study was conducted in a megacity. Women's self-worth with regard to decision making, decision-making opportunity, mobility, access to resources and ability to control their own lives were chosen in this study to facilitate the household-level analysis of the level of women's empowerment. These dimensions reflect the extent of empowerment in domestic life better and consequently expedite the achievement of the desired outcome of measuring the Women's Power Index (WPI). These dimensions contain several indicators included in the dimensions identified by various researchers (Hashemi et al., 1996; Malhotra et al., 2002). The significant positive performance of these five dimensions determines that women's power flourishes through the empowerment of women's groups.

Measurement Tools

Researchers have used different econometric tools and/or other qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse women's empowerment. Hashemi et al. (1996) represented women's empowerment using the logistic regression model with qualitative description. Other researchers (Nasir, Akhtar, & Salim, 2007; Rahman, Karmaker, & Mia, 2009; Rocca, Rathod, Falle, Pande, & Krishnan, 2009; Varghese, 2011) have used the logistic regression model for different criteria to represent the determinants of women's empowerment. Parveen and Leonhäuser (2004) recorded qualitative data in quantitative terms, assigning suitable scores and obtaining ranks from focus group discussions to develop the Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI). The effect of the independent variables of formal and non-formal education, sex of children, spousal relationship, media exposure, spatial mobility and socio-cultural norms on the CEI was shown in this study. Haque, Islam, Tareque and Mostofa (2011) analysed women's empower-

ment and autonomy using the 2004 National Institute of Population Research and Training data by establishing an index similar to the Human Development Index (HDI) and central tendency measure. The index was built using the following three dimensions: economic decision making, household decision making and physical movement. Certain socio-demographic independent variables, such as age of respondent, age at the time of marriage, educational attainment of the respondent, educational attainment of husband, rural and urban residence and religion and media exposure, were used in the multiple regression model to demonstrate the effect of these variables on the empowerment index. Chakrabarti and Biswas (2008) applied linear structural relationship methodology to observe latent unobservable variables for capabilities and functions in terms of achievements. The study reflects the performance in associated dimensions to indicate women's empowerment. Most variables in the present study are qualitative in nature. We developed the WPI based on these qualitative variables. The study considers the WPI as a binary dependent variable in the logistic regression model.

3. Research Guide

Sample

The present study is specific and captured only selected dimensions of life in Old Dhaka City. A large sample does not promise to represent the population accurately in a city such as Dhaka, where access to respondents is difficult. Thus, we concentrated on sample selection, as well as the intensity and accuracy of data, rather than on sample size. Studies conducted as early as the 1930s have suggested that parametric statistics with Likert data, small sample sizes, unequal variances and non-normal distributions can be used without the likelihood of reaching the wrong conclusion (Norman, 2010). The resource is limited, and capturing all dimensions of life is not essential for this study; thus, a 10 per cent error margin is allowed in sample size determination. Accordingly, 100 women were selected from 100 households, exclusively one woman from one household from the study area, with less concern about the non-representativeness of the population, as keen concentration was exerted in sample selection and data collection. The primary data were collected and the snags were kept to a minimum. We selected specific populated residential areas in the

heart of Old Dhaka City, such as Haji A. Mazid Lane, Kazi A. Rouf Road and Lakshmibazar, to obtain a representative sample that meets the objectives of this study.

The enumerators were highly familiar with the culture of the area of study. Graduate students of Jagannath University, staying in Old Dhaka region, were selected as enumerators.

An initial list of a large number of women was compiled from the study population. We randomly selected 100 individuals from the list. Observing and interviewing intensively were easy because all the enumerators and two of the authors were residents of the survey area; the authors were also directly involved in data collection. The observation method was used with the structured questionnaire interview. The enumerators were highly trained in data collection through questionnaire and observation. The authors conducted a pre-test survey, based on which the questionnaire was modified, before sending the enumerators to the field. Several questionnaires were cross-checked randomly.

The women in the sample frame were either tenants or homeowners, between 20 and 55 years old and married. A total of 100 questionnaires were circulated and each household was given one questionnaire. A total of 78 questionnaires were accepted after all screening steps. The remaining questionnaires were excluded because of defects, such as inconsistency, incomplete/missing information and no response. The data were input into a computerized system after the survey and subsequent screening. Our scope is limited, as this is the first study in this area and the resource is scant. There is further scope to study the elaborated dimensions of life, and scrutinize and bridge the knowledge gap in this study area.

Scaling

The arduous task of quantifying the qualitative human behaviour was performed through scaling techniques. The strict quantitative analysis of human behaviour is unconvincing, but the relative measurement is attainable. Different types of scaling were used to measure relative conditions and [resultant] human behaviour. In this study, five-point dimensions were used with scaled indicators to measure the WPI. The Likert-type scaling technique, through which respondents are asked to respond to several statements expressing a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the given object (Kothari, 1990, pp. 104–105), was used to

measure the traditional socio-cultural norm index. Three-, four- and five-point scaling techniques for different response items were used. A clear and coherent WPI was developed following the HDI construction method.

Dimensions of the Power Index

Women's power is experienced from the household to the international level, covering the economic, psychological, social and cultural aspects of living. Considered indicators for this study were observed only in the daily household environment because the study focuses only on the household-level practice of power. Women's self-worth with regard to decision making, decision-making opportunity, mobility, access to resources and control over their own lives were considered to depict the household-level condition of women's empowerment in the Old Dhaka region. All dimensions have several representative indicators to use for the WPI. Only those factors that are widely known and experienced in the study area were taken. The same factors were included although they overlapped in multiple dimensions from different angles of inquiry. Legal, social and upper-level political participatory issues were excluded from the index because this study focuses on the household level. The WPI was constructed from the five dimensions through the widely used geometric mean, which represented the percentage change more precisely than any other measure of central tendency. Each dimension index was generated with the following formula, which is the same formula used in HDI construction (Anand & Sen, 1994).

$$M_{ij} = \frac{X_{ij} - \min_k(X_{ik})}{\max_k(X_{ik}) - \min_k(X_{ik})}$$

where M_{ij} = index of the different dimensions: self-worth with regard to decision-making index (SDI), decision-making opportunity index (DMI), mobility index (MI), access to resources index (ARI) and control and regulate own life index (CRI)

X_{ij} = actual score of different dimensions
 $\min(X_{ik})$ = minimum score of a dimension
 $\max(X_{ik})$ = maximum score of a dimension

The WPI was obtained by including each and every dimension index as follows (Klugman, Francisco, & Choi, 2010):

$$\text{WPI} = \sqrt[3]{\text{SDI} \times \text{DMI} \times \text{MI} \times \text{ARI} \times \text{CRI}}$$

Description of Dimensions

Self-Worth with regard to Decision Making

The feelings of self-respect and dignity must be manifested for a person to be empowered (Ali, 2013), and then the sense of self-worth is realized from these feelings. Saussy (1991, p. 18) defined self-esteem as a complex disposition based on the following experiences: parental acceptance, an ideology that fosters self-esteem, satisfying relationships, competence, passion for life and self-acceptance. The sense of self-worth should be the topmost priority in measuring empowerment because nothing can be achieved without a person's own self-justification. Women who foster self-worth achieve power and vice versa. A study found that women with lower self-esteem are more vulnerable to abuse (Orava, McLeod, & Sharpe, 1996). Self-worth was included in the present study as one of the dimensions of WPI because it is relevant in a patriarchal society such as Bangladesh. Women's own conscious evaluation and confidence level were disclosed through their willingness to participate in different levels of decision making within the family. The dimension of self-worth with regard to decision making was included in the WPI as the proxy of self-worth or self-esteem. Thus, the respondent was asked whether she wants to give her input in decisions on purchasing furniture, spending savings, visiting a doctor for her or her child's health care, family planning, external income-generating activities and continuing her studies after marriage. The willingness to participate in these determinants of household-level exercise of power relates to the self-worth of women. To measure women's confidence level and willingness to participate in the exercise of power, we assigned three score values, namely, 0, 1 and 2, which represent "no", "indifferent" and "yes", respectively. As a result, the minimum score is 0 and the maximum is 12 for the six factors. For numerous reasons, women are not interested in working outside the home and studying after marriage, although these two are the most important criteria for women's empowerment. We hoped they could have responded "yes" for at least three criteria and "indifferent" for one. Out of 12, the minimum

score of 7 was needed to be empowered according to the expectation of the index value.

Decision-Making Opportunity

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995) prioritizes the decision making of women in all spheres of life and determines the actions to be taken by governments, political parties, national bodies, the private sector, trade unions, organizations of employers, research and academic institutions, sub-regional and regional bodies as well as non-governmental and international organizations. We re-examined the opportunity to participate at the household level when we observed the willingness of women to participate. To disclose the opportunity of right practice and to inspect the decision-making rights of women, we asked the respondents about who makes decisions on household chores (for example, cooking and cleaning), small and large purchases, spending money, own health care, child-related matters (for example, health, education and culture), visits to relatives and outside activities. Keeping the characteristic items of the dimension of decision-making opportunity nearly similar to the dimension of self-worth with regard to decision making has an insightful objective of understanding the household level appreciation of women. Thus, comparing the situation of how much the respondents are willing to participate with how far they can in reality participate becomes easier. Making decisions about small and large purchases has a huge gap. In numerous cases, women are permitted to purchase small essential and urgently needed goods and services, but not large items. To determine the gap, these two categories were included in the dimension of decision making. In Bangladesh, spending money is traditionally a task of the head of the household. Other issues related to health and outside decisions are equally important in the dimension of decision-making opportunity. Thus, 0, 1 and 2 were respectively assigned to making decisions “excluding the respondent”, “including the respondent” and “by the respondent alone”. The minimum score is 0 and the maximum 16 for all eight indicators. We believe that making a decision alone is not the only way to be empowered and what is important is how each woman is treated in the decision-making process. Her involvement in decision making with other family members is a good picture of empowerment that recognizes her importance in the family. Thus, we hoped that at least six criteria decisions would be made “including the respondent” and that one would be made “by the respondent alone”. The minimum empowerment score is 8 out of 16 from the expected participation in decision making.

Mobility

Freedom of movement has a momentous effect on women's empowerment (Boraian, 2008, p. 153; Hussain & Smith, 1999). Considering the situation of Bangladesh, this study represents the mobility dimension by including visits of women to friends' houses, markets, hospitals, daily bazaars and external workplaces. Going to the friends' houses is not a simple task for traditional married women in Bangladesh. Visiting a male friend is unimaginable in most instances, although this view has changed over time, particularly in educated families. Women's visits to hospitals and daily bazaars are common in Dhaka City. External workplace refers to the place where a woman works or any workplace for any purpose. In general, markets and external workplaces are frequently visited by women in Old Dhaka City. The respondents were asked with whom she visits the aforementioned places. A score of 0, 1 and 2 were assigned to "never visit", "with someone" and "alone". Thus, the maximum total score is 10 and the minimum is 0 for the five indicators. A respondent is considered empowered if her total score for the dimension is at least 6, with the expectation of her visiting at least two places "alone", visiting two places "with someone" and never visiting a place.

Access to Resources

Resources is the highest source of power (Hashemi et al., 1996; Kabeer, 1999; UN, 2009) and motivates feminist workers to demand equal property rights for women in Bangladesh. Resources may be tangible or intangible and internal or external to the family. In the present study, access to domestic and social resources, specifically tangible and intangible resources, is considered from the family point of view. Respondents were asked to rate their access to the following resource items: nourishing food, interpersonal communication, family budget, control over existing resources and family permission to access social resources (e.g. education, credit and employment). Points 0, 1, 2 and 3 were assigned to "no access", "low access", "medium access" and "unlimited access", respectively. The resultant range of the total score is between 0 and 15. We considered respondents empowered if their score is at least 10, that is, they have "unlimited access" to at least one criterion, such as nourishing food, "medium access" to three criteria and "low access" to one criterion. Resources are the real source of power; thus we emphasize the access to resources, which is reflected by the expected score of 10 out of 15.

Ability to Control and Regulate Own Life

When someone depends on others to control and regulate her own life, she cannot be empowered although scope may exist. The ability to control one's own life is not exclusively different from previous dimensions. When a woman has a sense of self-worth — a mental strength and an understanding of her own self as well as cognitive power, decision-making rights, access to resources, mobility and the power to exercise her rights which are supported by society — she can easily control and regulate her own life. A woman can control and regulate her own life if all factors are favourable; however, when other conditions are unfavourable, women struggle to control and regulate their own lives. Thus, we examine the ways by which women can control and regulate their lives. The respondents were asked how frequently they can do the following: move autonomously, protest against or protect herself from any illegal action, stay alone in any aspect of life for a short or long time and confidently face any unfavourable condition (e.g. financial crisis, natural calamity and disease). Scores of 0, 1 and 2 were assigned to “no”, “if there is no other means” and “yes”, respectively. The total score ranges from 0 to 8. The respondents were considered empowered if the total score for this dimension was at least 5; thus, we expected the answer “yes” for at least two criteria, “if there is no other means” for one criterion and “no” for one criterion. All dimensions containing the indicative factors for WPI are presented in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1 Indicators of the Dimensions

Women's empowerment				
↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Self-worth with regard to decision-making 1. Purchasing furniture; 2. Spending of savings; 3. Visit to doctor for own/child's health care; 4. Family planning; 5. External income generating work; 6. Continue study after marriage.	Decision-making opportunity 1. Household work; 2. Small purchase; 3. Large purchase; 4. Spending money; 5. Own health care; 6. Matter concerning child; 7. Visiting relatives; 8. External work.	Mobility 1. Friend's house; 2. Market; 3. Hospital; 4. Daily bazaar; 5. External workplace.	Access to resources 1. Nourishing food consumption; 2. Interpersonal communication; 3. Family budget; 4. Control over existing resources; 5. Family consent to access social resources (education, credit, employment).	Ability to control and regulate own life 1. Able to move autonomously; 2. Can protest/protect herself from any illegal actions; 3. Be alone; 4. Confidently face any unfavourable condition (financial crisis, natural calamity, diseases).

The indexes of the dimensions were constructed from the score values of the indicators. We expected a minimum total score value for each of dimension, from which the dimension index was calculated with the minimum and maximum scores of each dimension. The WPI was calculated encompassing all dimension index values. Each dimension with the minimum and maximum scores and the minimum expected index values are presented in [Table 1](#).

The index values are not necessarily absolute or at the optimum expected power level, but the minimum expectation of the study is in relative terms. This research work was accomplished in the capital city of a country with a developing identity. Reasonably, on the one hand, the index values should be high, as it is the capital city; on the other hand, the index values may fail to represent the optimum level of empowerment in a developing context. Consequently, moderate values were expected rather than extremely high or low value indices.

Traditional Socio-Cultural Norms

Culture encompasses beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours and traditions, where cultural norms are assumed to be contested, adapted and shaped with the changes in political and economic systems and even with technological and scientific development (UNFPA, 2005b). The empowerment of women is often believed to target the standard norms of societies (Ali, 2013) because the traditional socio-cultural norms, for example those that support patriarchal violence, act as impediments against women's empowerment in Latin America (UNFPA, 2008). The current study observes how traditional socio-cultural norms are still alive and influential, along with traditional identity, in an urban centre of Bangladesh. Thus, certain norms which have been influential in Bangladesh for a long period are examined to comprehend the effect of those norms. A unique independent variable, the socio-cultural norm index, was developed in order to understand the effect of traditional norms on the WPI. Six items in statement form were considered for the index. The cultural norms of the respondents were revealed from the responses to the following statements: "We should support early marriage", "Dowry is a tradition of our society", "A women should not go outside to respect the religion", "Guardian's understanding of women is not important", "domestic violence is normal in life" and "males should be prioritized". A five-point Likert scale ranging from

Table 1 Expected Value of Dimensions and Women's Power Index

<i>Dimensions of the women's empowerment</i>	<i>Minimum expected index value</i>	<i>Minimum expected Women's Power Index (WPI) value</i>
Self-worth with regard to decision-making: Min score = 0 Max score = 12	SDI = 0.58	The minimum Women's Power Index value is 0.60.
Decision-making opportunity: Min score = 0 Max score = 18	DMI = 0.5	For logistic regression, the study will consider:
Mobility: Min score = 0 Max score = 10	MI = 0.6	0.60 or more = 1 Otherwise = 0
Access to resources: Min score = 0 Max score = 15	ARI = 0.667	
Ability to control and regulate own life: Min score = 0 Max score = 8	CRI = 0.625	

1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used, and the traditional socio-cultural norm index was constructed using the same technique followed in constructing the dimensions of the WPI. The higher the index value, the lower the belief of the respondent in the traditional cultural norm. How the socio-cultural norm affects women's empowerment was observed through this index with the logistic regression model.

Hypotheses of the Study

Six independent variables were selected to determine their effect on women's practice of power. We hypothesized the effect of these independent variables on the WPI based on theory, literature and observation.

Educational Attainment of Women and Spouses Positively Affects WPI

The literacy rate in urban Dhaka is 61.1 per cent for both sexes, 56.7 per cent for females and 65.6 per cent for males and that in the whole of Bangladesh is 51.3 per cent for the 15–45 age group (BBS, 2013). The UN declared education as one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in development (UNPOPIN, 1994, para. 4.2). The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) also emphasize education and women's empowerment in Goals 2 and 3, where Bangladesh is on track to achieve certain targets and has already accomplished some. Basu and Koolwal (2005) defined the educational attainment of the respondent as the marker of empowerment and found that this factor positively affects food consumption, health-related outcomes as well as pregnancy and child-related health outcomes. A certain level of education of the spouse positively affects food consumption and health-related outcomes. According to the literature and theory, the educational attainment of both the respondent and her spouse was expected to favourably affect women's empowerment, thereby positively influencing the WPI in Old Dhaka City.

Income of Women Positively Affects WPI

Hashemi et al. (1996) found that women's increasing ability to contribute and support their families through credit programmes empowers women. Direct evidence exists with regard to women's empowerment through her earnings as a share of the household income (Islam, Ahmed, Chew, &

D'Netto, 2012; Kabeer, 1999), such that abuse and poverty are the sources of disempowerment for low-income women in many cases (Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Thus, we hypothesized that the income of women in the study group positively affects the WPI.

Age of Women at Time of Marriage Positively Affects WPI

Realizing the negative effects of early marriage, Bangladesh legally acknowledged 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of marriage for females and males, respectively. Approximately 66 per cent of females marry before the age of 18, and Bangladesh is fourth among countries with the highest rates of early marriage (ICRW, 2013). Every year, about 10 million girls get married before they reach the age of 18, and one in seven girls in the developing world is married before her 15th birthday, with some child brides as young as eight or nine years (USAID, 2013). Early marriage affects women's empowerment through reduced autonomy and bargaining power; limited access to education, economic opportunities, social networks, health information and services; unwanted pregnancy; higher maternal and infant deaths; high rates of HIV/AIDS and obstetric fistula; and high incidence of gender-based violence and dowry practices (Guilbert, 2003; UNICEF, 2013; USAID, 2013). The higher the age at marriage, the greater the agency of a person (Carmichael, De Moor, & van Zanden, 2011). Rationally, we hypothesized that a higher age at the time of marriage positively affects the WPI — that is, early marriage has a negative effect on the WPI.

Husband-to-Wife Age Gap Negatively Affects WPI

The lower the spousal age gap, the stronger the position of women in the household (Carmichael et al., 2011). In their study of West Bengal, Basu and Koolwal (2005) found both positive and negative effects of the spousal age gap on different food consumption, reproductive health, pregnancy and child-related health outcomes. In Bangladesh, husbands are traditionally older than their wives. Previously, the cultural marriage settlement in Bangladesh involved a significantly older husband, and even a 20- or 25-year age gap was unsurprising. The trend is changing, and the gap between the spouses has reduced over time. Marriages without an age gap between the husband and wife and those where the wife is older than her husband, which was barely possible in the traditional culture of Bangladesh, are taking place. In our

sample, all husbands were older than their wives, which reflect the general condition of Bangladeshi spouses. We specified this variable as husband-to-wife age gap and expected that the larger the husband-to-wife age gap, the greater the negative effect on women's power.

Traditional Socio-Cultural Norms Negatively Affect WPI

Similar to other cultural practices in Asian societies, such as patriarchy and dowries, child marriage negatively influences behaviour (UNFPA, 2005a). Basu and Koolwal (2005) found that 'thinking [that] domestic violence is not justified' in West Bengal positively affects the consumption of certain food items, reproductive health problems and child health outcomes, such as anaemia. Thus, we hypothesized that the traditional socio-cultural norm negatively affects women's practice of power in Old Dhaka City.

Tools of Analysis

Descriptive statistics and tabular methods were used to analyse the data. These quantitative tools of analysis facilitated our understanding of the study results. The logistic regression provided with ratios of odds was used to find the effect of explanatory variables on the WPI. What the logistic regression model explored is that there is influence of the explanatory variables on the WPI when the odds are significantly different from one. The explanatory variables have positive and negative influences on the WPI when the ratio of odds increases from 1 to infinity and decreases from 1 to 0 with increases in value of the explanatory variables, respectively.

4. Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the index values of the different dimensions of women's power and the overall WPI values are presented in Table 2. Established from the different characteristic indicators, the dimension indices show the state of women's empowerment in Old Dhaka City in terms of participating in different levels of power practice.

The mean values of some indices, namely, self-worth with regard to decision making, the decision-making opportunity and ability to control

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Different Dimensions and Women's Power Index

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Minimum expected value</i>	<i>Mean value</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Self-worth with regard to Decision-making Index (SDI)	78	0	1	0.58	0.70	0.203
Decision-making Opportunity Index (DMI)	78	0	1	0.50	0.57	0.179
Mobility Index(MI)	78	0	1	0.60	0.59	0.198
Access to Resources Index (ARI)	78	0	1	0.667	0.65	0.196
Ability to Control and Regulate Own Life Index (CRI)	78	0	1	0.625	0.67	0.232
Women's Power Index (WPI)	78	0	1	0.60	0.63	0.119

and regulate one's own life, were higher than the minimum expected value. However, the mean values of other indices, such as mobility and access to resources, have lower values than expected. The WPI value was also higher than the minimum expected. We expected nearly similar values for the self-worth with regard to decision making and the decision-making opportunity index, but that for decision-making opportunity was significantly lower. The mean value suggests that women's empowerment in Old Dhaka City was not worse although the results are not sufficiently persuasive. The result in Old Dhaka City is not the absolute indication of power, although it maintained the expected criteria for certain dimensions. This condition can be called moderate empowerment from the perspective of the present study. Self-worth with regard to decision making showed the highest score; thus women are aware of their rights. By contrast, mobility showed a lower score than self-worth with regard to decision making; although women in Bangladesh should be able to do many tasks, they cannot do them because of their frequent lack of mobility. The access to resources is lower than the minimum expectation, which re-emphasizes the scrutiny of the equal property rights movement in the country.

Comparative Statistics

Table 3 shows the various criteria according to which women's power may vary. The table represents those criteria and the attributed average WPI value with the observed number, percentage share and median. A strong sense about the empowerment of women in different groups was found from the comparative outcome of the WPI for different criteria.

25 per cent of the surveyed families were homeowners and 75 per cent lived in rented houses and were from other parts of the country. Women

Table 3 Comparative Statistics of Women's Power

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Observation number</i>	<i>Percentage share</i>	<i>Avg. Women's Power Index value</i>	<i>Median</i>
Status of residence	House owner	19	25	0.66	0.67
	Renter	57	75	0.62	0.60
	Total	76	100		
External income-generating work of respondent	Yes	14	18.18	0.72	0.71
	No	63	81.82	0.61	0.60
	Total	77	100		
Respondent's education	Level 0–8	19	24.36	0.59	0.57
	Level 9–12	36	46.15	0.62	0.63
	Level 12+	23	29.49	0.68	0.67
	Total	78	100		
Husband's education	0–8	13	16.88	0.59	0.57
	9–12	26	33.77	0.62	0.66
	12+	38	49.35	0.65	0.63
	Total	77	100		
Husband-to-wife age gap	0–<5	13	17.57	0.65	0.68
	5–<10	37	50	0.61	0.60
	10–<15	18	24.32	0.65	0.64
	15 =/+	6	8.11	0.68	0.71
	Total	74	100		
Age at the time of marriage	< or = 18	40	51.94	0.63	0.61
	>18	37	48.05	0.63	0.63
	Total	77	100		
Dowry	Yes	15	19.23	0.60	0.59
	No	63	80.77	0.64	0.63
	Total	78	100		

who own their house are more empowered in terms of the average and median power index value.

Moreover, 18 per cent of the women engaged in external income-generating activities, but 82 per cent of the sample did not. The women involved in external income-generating activities are considerably more empowered than those who are not involved in such activity. In addition, participation in income-generating activity influences the WPI more than the level of income.

Furthermore, women were grouped according to their educational attainment: primary, secondary and tertiary. In this study, primary education is from level 0 to level 8, secondary is from level 9 to level 12 and tertiary is above level 12. The higher the education of women, the more empowered they are and the greater the value of the WPI.

The educational attainment of the husband of the respondents also shows a systematic pattern with regard to the WPI. Educated husbands are more concerned about the rights of women, represented by the higher average WPI value for the higher level of education.

The husband-to-wife age gap failed to show any systematic trend with the WPI. Excluding the age gap 0 to 5 years, a higher age gap seems aligned with a higher WPI.

The age at the time of marriage reinforces the established fact that women younger than 18 years should not marry. The minimum age for females to marry in Bangladesh is 18 years; thus, we classified the women into two groups: married below or at 18 and married above 18 years old. Women who got married when they were above 18 years old are more empowered than those who married at 18 years or below.

Dowry affects women's empowerment in numerous ways. The higher the age of women at the time of marriage, the larger the dowry (Chowdhury, 2010), whereas the decreasing economic role is the cause of dowry (Kishwar, 1999). The literature explains dowry-related unhappiness in Bangladesh (Naved & Persson, 2010; Suran, Amin, Huq, & Chowdhury, 2004). We found that women who did not give a dowry practised more power than those who gave a dowry.

Regression Result

The logistic regression was conducted to observe the effect of some crucial variables on women's practice of power. The regression

examined the effect of the education levels of women and their husbands, own income of women, age at the time of marriage, husband-to-wife age gap and socio-cultural factors on the WPI. The regression results are the major findings of this study and show that the years of education of women, age of women at the time of marriage and husband-to-wife age gap affect the WPI at the 5 per cent level of significance. The two prior results support our hypotheses, but the third one rejects the corresponding hypothesis. The odds of one extra year of women's education improving the WPI value is 1.53 times higher than the odds of it not increasing the period of education. The odds that increasing the minimum age of marriage would improve the index value are 1.40 times higher than the odds of not increasing the age of marriage. The odds of increasing the husband-to-wife age gap are 1.38 times higher than those of no increase in age gap. The level of income does not have any effect at the 5 per cent level of significance, but has an effect at the 10 per cent level of significance. The regression result reinforces the preceding result which explained in descriptive statistics that involvement in income earning is more important than the level of income. The years of a husband's education does not increase the odds of the WPI. Interestingly, the socio-cultural norms index does not show any effect on the WPI, resulting in the rejection of our hypothesis. The well-established view on traditional and religious taboos in Bangladesh is refuted by the study in Old Dhaka City. The summary of the regression result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Logistic Regression Result: Women Empowerment Index as Dependent Variable in Binary Form

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>Std. err</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>P>Z</i>	<i>95% confidence interval</i>	
Own education	1.53	0.25	2.57	0.010	1.11	2.11
Husband's education	0.79	0.12	-1.58	0.114	0.59	1.06
Own income	1.00	0.00	1.69	0.092	0.999	1.00
Age at marriage	1.40	0.23	2.05	0.040	1.01	1.94
Husband-to-wife age gap	1.43	0.16	3.19	0.001	1.15	1.78
Socio-cultural norms	1.38	2.65	0.17	0.868	0.032	59.82

5. Discussion

Women have made progress in participating at various political and administrative levels. The five dimension indices — self-worth with regard to decision making, decision-making opportunity, mobility, access to resources and ability to control and regulate own life — are considered in order to measure women's practice of power in Old Dhaka City. The average values of three indices — self-worth with regard to decision making, decision-making opportunity and ability to control and regulate own life — satisfy the expectation. The average values of two indices — mobility and access to resources — are lower than expected. The WPI is the metric of women's power in Old Dhaka City and was constructed based on five dimensions. The WPI satisfies the minimum expectation. Among the independent variables, the education of women, age of women at the time of marriage and husband-to-wife age gap positively affect the WPI at the 5 per cent level of significance. The three other independent variables — income of women, education of husband and socio-cultural norms — do not have any significant effect at the 5 per cent level.

The respect of women for their own abilities is demonstrated by the higher-than-expected value of self-worth with regard to decision making. Practising power is impossible without realizing and evaluating one's own capacity. The women in Old Dhaka City have this realization and evaluation. The value of self-worth with regard to decision making reflects the progress in women's participation. Decision-making opportunity is also positively in accordance with our expectation. The performance of decision-making opportunity is consistent with the result of a welfare survey on household decisions, where 70.7 per cent of the decisions are made jointly by the husband and wife, 20.1 per cent by the husband and 9.2 per cent by the wife (BBS, 2010). Decision-making opportunity, along with self-worth with regard to decision making, promotes women's practice of power; however, the value of self-worth with regard to decision making is considerably higher than that of decision-making opportunity despite almost similar indicators for these two indices and nearly similar expected values. The result re-emphasizes the need to focus on harmonizing the performance of different dimensions. One of the crucial questions is this: to what extent can women use their rights once acquired? This question emerged from the ability to control and regulate own life index, which has a higher than expected value. All of these three dimensions jointly assist women's practice of power in the Old Dhaka region.

In brief, we have revealed the level of willingness of women to practise power (0.70 against the expectation of 0.58), the availability of the right and opportunity to practise power (0.57 against the expectation of 0.50) and the ability to practise power (0.67 against the expectation of 0.625). We found expected but imbalanced performance of these three dimensions.

Movement is a key determinant of power practice, but the mobility of women is still not satisfactory because women are either incapable of or prohibited from movement. Even if the women are allowed to move, they cannot exercise their freedom for various reasons, such as security concerns, lack of courage and lack of suitable mode of transportation. In some circumstances, the mobility of women is allowed but unutilized. Sometimes, because of respect for family and cultural values, women do not confirm that they are allowed to move freely. In certain cases, women do not feel capable of moving around alone even though they are allowed to do so. As a result, mobility had a value lower than expected. Bangladeshi women are deprived of access to resources, which causes the lower index value. The husbands or other males are the heads of the family in the patriarchal Bangladeshi society. Generally, the male head and/or senior family member hold the supreme right to access resources. The lack of mobility and access to resources hinder the achievement of optimum women's power.

Theoretical, literary and general recognition of education is again supported by the findings of this paper, that is, education positively affects women's practice of power. The primary and secondary education targeted for women's empowerment by the MDG has already been accomplished in Bangladesh, but the tertiary-level target has yet to be achieved. Thus, this goal must be the focus of policy formulation.

The level of own income has no significant effect on power. Women's participation in income-generating activity is more important than their level of income. Women become more conscious about life when they are involved in an income-generating activity. The level of income may affect the standard of living, but not the practice of power resulting from the cognitive and surrounding attitudes. Participation in income-generating activities promotes the cognitive development of women, enabling them to practise power, but the education of the husband has no significant effect on women's practice of power. The domineering attitude of Bangladeshi males, regardless of the extent of education they have received, was verified in this study.

Early marriage is banned in Bangladesh because of its damaging effects on women, as established in the current study. The theoretical and empirical

findings point to the need to stop the practice of early marriage, which remains a common phenomenon. Thus, steps should be taken to eliminate early marriage.

The husband-to-wife age gap positively affects the WPI at the 1 per cent level of significance, thereby denying our hypothesis. The increase in the age gap by one year increases the odds of women's practice of power by 1.43 times compared to no increase in the gap. Several reasons for such conflicting results were derived from our observations. When the age gap is small or does not exist, the wife becomes courageous enough to raise her voice, although the other family members and even the husband are not traditionally habituated to comply with the preferences or demands of women. Consequently, family members become disgruntled with the woman, causing her to face obstacles within the family. The result is a reverse effect on power practice through different dimensions, namely, access to resources and decision-making opportunity. When the age surplus is large, the power index shows a higher value for lack of courage or lack of realizing the woman's rights. Sometimes, being the younger partner in the conjugal relationship with a larger husband-to-wife age gap, women gain support from their husband and family. The power with the larger husband-to-wife age gap seems to arise from fraudulence and chicanery, not from actual practice.

Traditional socio-cultural norms are believed to be deeply rooted in Bangladesh, but the study failed to find any significance in relation to women's practice of power. These ineffective factors may have caused the recent substantial progress in women's performance. The finding is congruent with the general observation that Old Dhaka residents are not susceptible to traditional norms and beliefs.

In a nutshell, women can use their own abilities and only need support from their environment. In the family and elsewhere, power works as a zero-sum game (Rowlands, 1997, p. 9), which prevents people from distributing power among all groups of people. If this zero-sum game can be stopped, that is, if a win-win game is possible, the social capacity will be formed in accordance with the valuable role of women.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Women's practice of power is not optimally high, but is at moderate or tolerable levels in Old Dhaka City. The lives of women have been changing. Their high self-worth with regard to decision making is a sign of growing

consciousness. Over time, women have been increasingly involved in decision making. Their mobility is lacking, but is close to our expectation. We hope that the mobility of women will increase along with the improvements in facilities, such as reserved seats for women on public transport and law enforcement to stop sexual harassment against women. Access to resources is the key to power but women are not allowed to perform well, as indicated by a value lower than expected. Women can regulate and control their own lives according to the expectation of the study, but sustained support from society is necessary for continued performance. Women do well in regulating and controlling their lives even though the overall performance is not at the highest satisfactory level. Using the results of this study, we recommend certain steps to improve the power practice of women.

Women have perceptions about their rights and abilities. Sustained support from the state and society is necessary to improve their perceptions. The education of women should not be compromised, and the ongoing support for women's education should be intensified. Involvement in income-generating activities should be expanded because of its supportive role in women's practice of power and because it has a similar trend in the WPI and a significant effect at the 5 per cent level.

The law on the minimum age of marriage must be followed strictly. Campaigning against early marriage may help stop this tradition. Support for women should be provided in the form of income-related activities to make them active stakeholders in the economy.

When women feel too insecure to move beyond their homes, the benefit from mobility decreases. A good working environment, as well as reliable traffic and security systems, should be provided to encourage the mobility of Bangladeshi women.

The deep-rooted importance of women at the family level is essential to improve their access to resources. The right of women to inherit property, which can strengthen the position of women in the family, should be respected. Dowry practices should be stopped to ensure women's empowerment. Thus, objective law enforcement must be strengthened.

Policy steps that have already been taken, including the provision of transport facilities for women, public and private partnerships in women's entrepreneurial arrangements as well as rules against sexual harassment, deserve appreciation because they support the goal of female empowerment in Bangladesh. Thus, this study recommends keeping these policies operational and introducing other effective strategies to promote the abilities and protect the rights of women.

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