

Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI)

Oxford Department of International Development
Queen Elizabeth House (QEH), University of Oxford



OPHI

Research in Progress series 2009

This paper is part of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative's Research in Progress (RP) series. These are preliminary documents posted online to stimulate discussion and critical comment. The series number and letter identify each version (i.e. paper RP1a after revision will be posted as RP1b) for citation.

Please cite these papers as Author Last name, First name, "Title" (Year) *OPHI Research in Progress ###a*. (For example: Alkire, Sabina and Foster, James "Counting and Multidimensional Poverty" (2007) *OPHI Research in Progress 1a*.)

For more information, see www.ophi.org.uk.

Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), Oxford Department of International Development, Queen Elizabeth House (QEH), University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK
Tel. +44 (0)1865 271915, Fax +44 (0)1865 281801, ophi@qeh.ox.ac.uk, <http://www.ophi.org.uk>

OPHI gratefully acknowledges support from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)/(DFID) Joint Scheme, Robertson Foundation, Praus, UNICEF N'Djamena Chad Country Office, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (GIZ), Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), John Fell Oxford University Press (OUP) Research Fund, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report Office, national UNDP and UNICEF offices, and private benefactors. International Development Research Council (IDRC) of Canada, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), UK Department of International Development (DFID), and AusAID are also recognised for their past support.



**Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
Department of International Development
Queen Elizabeth House
University of Oxford**

Agency and Empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence^ξ

Emma Samman[^] and Maria Emma Santos^{*}

Prepared for the 2009 Human Development Report
in Latin America and the Caribbean

First Draft: May 18, 2009

Contents:

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Concepts of agency and empowerment in the literature**
 - 2.1 Alternative frameworks
 - 2.2 Distinctive features
 - 2.3 Vulnerable groups
 - 2.4 Indicators of agency
- 3. Empirical Evidence**
 - 3.1 Agency's determinants and correlates
 - 3.2 Agency's impacts on development outcomes
- 4. Conclusions**
- 5. References**
- 6. Appendix: Summary table of revised studies**

^ξ This review corresponds to the first part of a background paper for the 2009 Human Development Report in Latin America and the Caribbean on Agency, Empowerment and the Intergenerational Transmission of Inequality in Latin America.

[^] Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford *and* Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex.

^{*} Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford *and* Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET)-Universidad Nacional del Sur, Argentina.

1. Introduction

Motivated by Sen's capability approach (1980, 1985, 1993, 1999), the 2001 World Development Report (World Bank 2001) as well as the *Voices of the Poor* study (Narayan *et al.* 2000a, 2000b), the concepts of agency and empowerment have garnered increasing attention in the development literature and in policies aimed at poverty reduction. However, these concepts are inherently complex and have been interpreted in numerous ways.¹ In the review that follows, we seek both to outline the main parameters of the debate conceptually and several empirical applications, but also to advance the conceptual underpinnings of the approach that we take to the measurement of empowerment. In turn, this approach informs the survey that was collected for this study and the way the data will be analysed.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we begin to advance a conceptual framework by first sketching the dominant approaches used in understanding what is empowerment and what are its constituent features, and advocating the approach of Alkire and Ibrahim (2007) (which is directly informed by Sen's work on agency and capabilities). We illustrate that the concept of empowerment is multidimensional, culturally grounded and relational, and that it applies at different levels of aggregation. We observe that while it has most often been used to explore the relative position of women to men, and the consequences of redressing this balance, the framework ought to be applied to understanding the position of individuals and groups disadvantaged along other axes as well. We provide the specific indicators we apply to measure the empowerment of both adults and their children. In Section 3, we review the empirical studies that have been conducted using direct measures of agency, focusing on the determinants of empowerment, and its impacts. We are interested in agency both as an intrinsic good and because of its instrumental importance, given our interest in the inter-generational transmission of agency. We were unable to locate any quantitative analyses of the intergenerational transmission of inequality. Section 4 concludes.

¹ For instance, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) provide a table summarizing 32 definitions of empowerment they identified in the literature (p. 7-8).

2. Concepts of agency and empowerment in the literature

2.1 Alternative frameworks

Narayan (2002, 2005), Alsop and Heinsohn (2005), Petesh, Smulovitz and Walton (2005), and Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) have converged upon a common conceptual framework for understanding empowerment, first outlined in the World Bank publication *Empowerment and Poverty: A Sourcebook*. Empowerment is viewed broadly as increasing poor people's freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives (Narayan 2005, p.4). It is *the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes* (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, 2006, p.10). This process of 'increasing-power' is conceived as the result of the interaction between two building blocks: **agency** and **opportunity structure**.

Agency is *an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices*. They consider agency to be strongly determined by people's individual assets (such as land, housing, livestock, savings) and capabilities of all types: human (such as good health and education), social (such as social belonging, a sense of identity, leadership relations) and psychological (self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to imagine and aspire to a better future), and by people's collective assets and capabilities, such as voice, organization, representation and identity.

The opportunity structure refers to the *broader institutional, social, and political context of formal and informal rules and norms within which actors pursue their interests*. In other words, the opportunity structure is what enables (or not) agents to become effective. According to Narayan (2002, 2005), the opportunity structure encompasses both the institutional climate and the social and political structures. In turn, the institutional climate may include access to information, the degree of inclusion and participation in the economic life (e.g., poor people may not be able to participate in all markets, such as credit), the degree of accountability of the public sector and the capacity of local organization. The social and political structures refer to the degree of openness that poor people have to make use of opportunities and services. These authors consider that an opportunity structure that allows people to translate their asset base into effective

agency, through more equitable rules and expanded entitlements constitutes a prerequisite for empowerment (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland 2006, p. 16). Indeed, they consider more generally that when measuring empowerment, one should analyze (a) whether an opportunity to make a choice exists – *existence of choice*; b) whether a person or group actually uses the opportunity to choose – *use of choice*; and c) whether the choice brings about the desired result – *achievement of choice*.

This basic framework has been used by the World Bank and has guided several research studies on the determinants and impacts of empowerment (cited below). The approach has the advantage of highlighting the fact that even when individuals have a pro-active attitude, they may be constrained by the institutional environment in which they operate in such a way that they may not be able to transform their choices into the desired outcomes. On the other hand, by defining empowerment so broadly, they risk confusing it with the whole of the development process. Indeed, in Sen's framework, the expansion of opportunities (named capabilities in his approach) together with the expansion of process freedoms (agency) *is* what defines development. To retain the focus on the individual, we focus on agency itself, following the approach developed by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Alkire (2008).

Sen (1985) defines agency as *what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important* (p. 203). In his view, it constitutes a *process freedom* (Sen 1999). The other key concept in Sen's framework is that of *opportunity freedoms* or capabilities – “the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve” (Sen 1992, p. 40). The expansion of both types of freedoms – processes and opportunities – is the objective of development and therefore, of intrinsic value. Then, empowerment is conceived as the *expansion of agency* (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007), in other words, as a trend variable.² Just as *growth* is the increase in *GDP* per capita, *empowerment* can be seen as the increase in *agency*.

In the previous framework, the ability to make choices (agency) is separated from the realization or effectiveness of these choices (empowerment), with the latter

² Kabeer (2001a) advances a similar understanding of empowerment as *the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them*. As noted by Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002), this definition considers empowerment as a *process* – a change from a condition of disempowerment – which requires an agency role: people are significant actors in the change process.

incorporating the presence of external opportunities or constraints. In this framework, as mentioned, we exclude institutional factors – however, the conception of agency itself is somewhat broader, referring to both direct control *and* effective power. By effective power, Sen refers to outcomes that are the results that the individual *would* have chosen, even if she did not take a deliberate choice: “a person’s freedom may reasonably be assessed in terms of the person’s power to achieve certain results, regardless of whether the person controls the process generating those results” (Kaufman 2006, p. 292). This conception does not imply a lack of concern for the constrained opportunities some people face, which may limit their effectiveness in terms of achieving the goals they would like to achieve. On the contrary, in Sen’s framework, opportunity freedom is one of the two building blocks of the development process. *It should be clear (...) that the view of freedom that is being taken here involves both the processes that allow freedom of actions and decisions, and the actual opportunities that people have, given their personal and social circumstances. Unfreedom can arise either through inadequate processes (such as the violation of voting privileges or other political or civil rights) or through inadequate opportunities that some people have for achieving what they minimally would like to achieve (including the absence of such elementary opportunities as the capability to escape premature mortality or preventable morbidity or involuntary starvation)* (Sen 1999, p. 17, emphasis added).

In short, the first framework considers agency and the opportunity structure as together constituting empowerment; in the second, empowerment is conceived as the expansion of agency, which, alongside the expansion of opportunities, constitutes development. This conceptualisation of agency and empowerment obviously affects how it should be measured. In what follows we will argue that the individual exercise of direct control and/or effective power provides the most appropriate measure of agency, and treat institutional components as external to this definition.

In terms of the implications of the concept of agency for development policies, it is worth noting that agency emerged in opposition to top-down approaches to development (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005, p. 73; Sen, 1999). Rather than designing policies to ‘target’ specific groups (the women, the poor, the ethnic minorities), whose members are implicitly seen as passive ‘inert’ recipients, the agency perspective

considers individuals as able to bring about change in their lives through individual and/or collective activity (see Sen 1999).

Finally, it is worth remarking that agency and empowerment matter both intrinsically and instrumentally. Agency is considered to be an important *end* in itself; indeed, this understanding is pivotal to Sen's capability approach: "agency freedom is freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent decides he or she should achieve" (Sen, 1985, p. 206).³ Instrumentally, agency matters because it has been hypothesized and many times confirmed, that it can serve as a *means* to other development outcomes. The agency of women for instance, has been shown to affect positively the wellbeing of all those around them (Sen 1999, p. 191).

2.2 Distinctive features

Despite differences in the previous frameworks, experts have reached a certain consensus on some 'distinctive features' of agency and empowerment, and how it ought to be measured. Here we address the multidimensionality of the concept, its relational nature and its cultural foundations.

First, agency is inherently *multidimensional*: it can be exercised in different spheres, domains and levels. **Spheres** refer to societal structures in which people are embedded, which can give rise to, shape, and or constrain the exercise of agency. These are typically the state, in which a person is a civic actor; the market, in which the person is an economic actor; and society –in which the person is a social actor (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, 2006, p. 19).⁴ These broad spheres contain several sub-spheres. For example, society includes the household and community sphere. The **domains** (or **dimensions**) refer to the multiple areas of life in which a person may exercise agency, such as making expenditures, practicing a religion, getting (or not) education and health, deciding whether to participate in the labour market and in which type of job, and freedom of mobility. Obtaining a full and nuanced understanding of agency requires considering its manifestation in different domains of life. Many researchers have stressed

³ In this sense, it exceeds the concept of wellbeing in that well-being is tied up with a person's own state (Alkire, 2005, p. 2).

⁴ Actually the authors call these domains. We call them spheres and reserve the word domain for the different areas within a sphere in which the individual can operate.

the importance of considering the empowerment in multiple domains (Isvan 1991; Kishor 1995; 2000; Hashemi *et al.* 1996; Mason 1998; Malhotra and Mather 1997; Jejeebhoy 2000; Beegle, Frankenberg, and Thomas (2001); Malhotra *et al.* 2002). For instance, Malhotra and Mather (1997) argue that: “power is multilocational and exists in multiple domains...it is important that any discussion regarding [empowerment] specify whether this is within the family, social or political spheres, and whether the locus of control is within the household or the community” (p. 604). Reviewing existing frameworks, Malhotra *et al.* (2002) suggest: “**women’s empowerment** needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. However, these dimensions are very broad in scope, and within each dimension, there is a range of sub-domains within which **women** may be empowered.” (p. 13). Even though an advance in agency in one dimension may enhance agency in others, this is not always the case; for example a woman may be very empowered as a mother but excluded from the labour force by social conventions (Alkire, 2008, p.11). Conversely, Mason (2005, p.91) observes that women in Kumasi, Ghana, are powerful economically (they work as traders, control a large market and hire men to do their bookkeeping), but they are sexually and socially submissive to their husbands in the domestic arena and peripheral to the political process.

Empirical evidence supports this view. In Mason and Smith’s (2003) study of married women in rural and peri-rural areas of five Asian countries (India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand), they find that different aspects of women’s reported empowerment (e.g., their decision-making capability and freedom of mobility) tend to be poorly correlated, with correlations rarely exceeding 0.3. Similarly, Jejeebhoy (2000) finds that associations between the 105 indicators of autonomy she considers were “always in the expected direction, usually significant, but for the most part, moderate, exceeding 0.25 in only 10 of the 105 coefficients presented” (p. 222). In a study of Egypt, Kishor (2000) finds a wide range of variance in terms of the correlations between the 32 empowerment indicators she considers and the 10 factors she extracts from them. Finally, Alkire, Chirkov and Silva Leander (mimeo) report that for women in Kerala, correlations between domain-specific agency indicators were significant but rarely over 0.35, suggesting that each is conveying distinct information.

Further, individuals may become agents as individuals and/or part of a collective, and may exercise this agency at different **levels** (e.g., micro (household), meso (community), macro (state or country, etc.)). The set of skills required for the exercise of agency at each level seems to be somehow different, though some skills may be transferable. At the individual level people may need to be self-confident, self-determined, to know what they want, and to direct their actions towards that goal. At a collective level, individuals must surmount the collective action problem, attain consensus, and take on a role either as a leader or follower. People that act as agents in their individual lives are more likely to engage in collective action, but this does not necessarily follow; they may lack the motivation or the skills to do so. Revising the literature, Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002) find that conceptual clarity at the highest and lowest levels of aggregation (micro and macro),⁵ but not at the intermediate levels, and they surmise that this may explain why this level of aggregation has been overlooked in empirical research. They consider that it is often precisely at intermediate levels – e.g., communities – that normative changes regarding family systems, infrastructure, gender ideologies, regional or local market processes occur and that programmatic or policy interventions often operate.

Second, agency and empowerment are *relational* concepts, empowerment does not occur in a vacuum. Certain groups are empowered or disempowered in relation to others with whom they interact (Narayan, 2005; Mason, 2005). Empowering people implies helping them to become agents. It should be noted however, that this process should not be understood as a zero-sum game in which individuals and/or groups compete over a finite amount of power. As described by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), Rowlands' (1997) categorization of power can be useful in enumerating different types of gains from empowerment. In this framework, empowerment can be classified as a process in which people gain *power over* (resisting manipulation), *power to* (creating new possibilities), *power with* (acting in a group) and *power from within* (enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance).

⁵ Note that a number of indicators have been devised to measure empowerment at the national level, such as the UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM); on the GEM, see Pillarissetti and McGillivray (1998).

Third, because they are relational, agency and empowerment are highly *cultural* concepts, related to the system of norms, values and beliefs of a society (Malhotra and Mather 1997; Mason 2005; Narayan, 2005). Indeed, Mason and Smith (2003) report that in the five Asian countries they study, country and community of residence predict women's domestic empowerment better than their personal socioeconomic and demographic traits. Jejeebhoy and Sathar's (2001) comparison of determinants of empowerment in Pakistan and in two Indian states makes this point vividly. They report that "region plays a strong and consistent role in shaping female autonomy. No matter which indicator of autonomy is considered, women residing in the southern part of the subcontinent consistently display significantly higher levels of autonomy than do women residing in the north... Our findings demonstrate the centrality of social institutions of gender within each community" (p. 707-708). In Sri Lanka, Malhotra and Mather (1997) find that "there are limitations on the extent to which women's empowerment is an individualized rather than a social process, and therefore... microlevel measures of personal capability and circumstances may not be the universal or critical driving force behind the various dimensions of domestic power" (p. 600). Consequently, context can be an important driver of the extent to which empowerment at the household or individual level may engender development outcomes (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002).

But then, does this mean that agency and empowerment is absolutely context-specific and can only be assessed on a case-by-case basis? In this case, little could be learnt from empirical research to inform the design of development policies. Fortunately, there seems to be scope for common frameworks across countries and even internationally comparable indicators. However, these should be complemented with context-dependent measures. For example, in their study of the effects of microcredit programs on women's empowerment in Bangladesh, India, and Bolivia, Schuler *et al.* (1995a and 1995b) defined a common set of dimensions of women's empowerment but they used indicators relevant to each particular country and community setting. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) argue in favor of internationally comparable indicators that could be complemented with context-dependent measures of empowerment.

Clearly, each of these distinctive features open a range of possibilities for studying empowerment: Which spheres, domains and level of aggregation will be the

focus of study? To what extent will the study be universal and to what extent context-specific? But more importantly, *whose* empowerment is one interested in – i.e., in relation to which other group? The relational aspect leads us to considering the groups that have captured the attention of the studies on empowerment.

2.3 Vulnerable groups

Two groups have captured most of the attention in the empowerment literature: women and the poor. The status of poor women emerges as particularly important. In a 1990 article, Amartya Sen drew attention to the extreme consequences of the disempowerment of women in many developing countries, making the startling claim that more than 100 million women were ‘missing’ owing to systematic discrimination against them: “in most of Asia and North Africa, the failure to give women medical care similar to what men get and to provide them with comparable food and social services results in fewer women surviving than would be the case if they had equal care” (n.p.).⁶ Sen goes on to attribute this neglect to a lack of “status and power” among women – which in turn he suggests, might be fostered by gainful employment outside the home, asset ownership and literacy.

Gender is of course not the only axis along which disempowerment occurs – disempowerment may be a function of age, class, ethnicity, religion and many other factors – and these particular factors as well as the intersections among them should be taken into account. However, the issue of female disempowerment has a special resonance for the intergenerational transmission of equality given that women, biologically and typically as primary caretakers, are more likely to affect the early outcomes of their children. The poor are another group that the empowerment literature addresses. Lacking material and human resources, the poor are disempowered with respect to those that do possess such resources. Indeed, the World Bank’s *Empowerment and Poverty: A Sourcebook*, focus the attention on the empowerment of the poor. There, Narayan shows that for poor people’s freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives is severely curtailed by their powerlessness in relation to a range of institutions,

⁶ He revisits this point in Sen (1999): “...there is plenty of evidence that identifies the biologically “contrary” (socially generated) excess mortality of women in Asia and North Africa, with gigantic numbers of “missing women” – “missing” in the sense of being dead as a result of gender bias in the distribution of health care and other necessities” (p. 190-191).

both formal and informal. Empowerment is consequently viewed as the expansion of the assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.

In general, vulnerable groups may vary from one part of the world to another. For example, in many Latin-American countries the disempowerment of indigenous populations appears to be significant (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 1994; Glewwe and Hall, 1998 cited in Narayan, 2005). Moreover, the most vulnerable groups are likely to be constituted by an intersection of categories.

2.4 Indicators of agency

Any attempt to study levels, determinants or effects of agency must first determine how to measure the concept itself. Owing to its multidimensionality, more than one variable is required (Kishor 2000; Estudillo *et al.* 2001, Malhotra *et al.* 2002). However, establishing what to measure and how requires first going back to the concept of agency we enumerated above, and then considering the sphere, domains, levels and relations it should involve.

Agency has been mostly been measured indirectly – through proxies or observed behaviours – though a growing body of research argues that it should be measured directly. Narayan (2005) argues that empowerment is a latent phenomenon, *‘its presence can only be deduced through its action or its results. Most observed behaviours are proxies for the underlying phenomenon* (p.15). Kishor (2000) argues for the importance of considering setting, source and evidence indicators. Indeed, very frequently, agency has been measured with proxies such as land ownership, literacy, frequency of radio/TV listening, employment history, etc. This approach has been strongly criticized (Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996, Malhotra and Mather 1997, Mason 1998, Malhotra *et al.* 2002) for conflating indicators which reflect preconditions for the exercise of agency with agency itself. Malhotra and Mather (1997) observe that education and employment have been most frequently used to proxy empowerment and argue: “Even if these measures can be considered indicators of access to resources, they do not automatically indicate control: the connection must be established rather than assumed” (p. 604).

Alkire (2008) identifies four main problems of using proxy measures. In the first place, assets may not translate into agency in the same way for different individuals (usually referred as differential conversion factors). Secondly, by equating assets with agency, the pathways through which assets may increase agency are ignored. For example, Malhotra and Schuler (2005) argue that it is not the same whether a woman gets a cow because she saved money and bought it, than because she inherited it. The agency level associated with each situation is likely to be different, as the first case implied a learning process in bringing about change. Thirdly, if we only look at asset holdings, an increase in agency will not be noticed if with the same asset holdings, the person became much more proactive for another reason (contact with a neighbour, something she/he read, etc). Finally, many of these proxies are identical to measures used in traditional poverty analysis (the difference is only in its interpretation). This precludes the possibility of exploring the interconnections between agency and poverty. For all these reasons, direct measures of agency – as difficult as they may be to develop – seem the appropriate tool for evaluating and studying empowerment.

Attempts to measure agency directly surface in a small number of studies that we discuss below (Hashemi *et al.* (1996); Mason (1998); Zaman (1999); Jejeebhoy (2000); Hindin (2000), Jejeebhoy and Sathra (2001); Kishor (2000); Malhotra and Mather (1997); Mason and Smith (2000); Al Riyami *et al.* (2004); Alkire *et al.* (mimeo); Kamal and Zunaïd (2006); Gupta and Yesudian (2006); Allendorf (2007) and Ibrahim and Alkire (2007). In her review of the literature, Jejeebhoy (2000) finds the following common direct measures of autonomy: economic decision-making; child-related decision-making; marriage related decision-making; freedom of movement; power relations with husband; access to resources; and control over resources. Typically, researchers aggregate this data in one of two ways. Most commonly, they construct indices of each (often denoting whether the respondent has sole control or joint control over a range of decisions, or whether she can visit a list of places unescorted). In some cases, they obtain latent measures of empowerment through factor analysis or item response theory.

Our view is that this focus on direct indicators is a large step in the right direction, in enabling a direct focus on the issue of making purposeful choices, as distinct from the issue of the opportunity structure. We consider the issues of choice and of effective

freedom, and the extent to which the choices people make are congruent with what they value. As Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) observe, these two concepts – that of whether agency is being exercised and whether the respondent values this agency – must be measured separately. The issue of which sphere to study was carefully considered. The political sphere, in addition to being sensitive in some countries (which might hinder survey implementation), requires democratic government and a certain institutional similarity for effective comparison. The sphere of the market requires the presence of a market economy and the involvement of the respondent in some facet of income generation. We opted for the sphere of society to maximize the coverage and international comparability of the indicators we selected. Moreover, a focus on society permits analysis of the household and therefore, draws gender-based inequalities into relief (Malhotra and Schuler 2005), while being particularly relevant to our concern with the effects of empowerment on child outcomes. It does encompass one's political and market participation, but from the perspective of whether household relations enable or constrain such participation. Within this societal focus, we aim to include several domains of wellbeing, selected according to what seemed most relevant to the context and subject matter, and in order to encompass the widest number of respondents possible. In particular, we utilized minor household expenses, main activity (either paid work or domestic tasks), children's education.

Our focus will be particularly on individual level action; this is not because we feel it is more important than the other levels but simply because it was necessary to restrict our focus to a particular level, and we are interested in individual level determinants of and outcomes associated with empowerment – for which we need to consider the situations of individuals that are and are not involved in collective action. Assessing the impact of collective agency would seem to require a different type of survey and sampling. Finally it should be noted that the module we propose relies on self-reported data; as such, it is prone to the thorny problem of adaptive preferences (that systematically deprived people might not perceive the extent of their deprivation).⁷ As agency inherently concerns perceptions – the ability to act inherently is about perceptions – this does not invalidate the use of subjective data but does suggest that care be taken in

⁷ See Sen (1979, 1985, 1987, 1993, 2002).

its interpretation. We argue that such perceptual data are additionally useful here in illuminating the respondents' values and in identifying what sorts of policy interventions are needed – if lack of awareness constrains agency, this requires a different policy response than lack of opportunity (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, p. 28).

2.5 Our indicators of adult agency

The indicators of agency we propose to use correspond to the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)'s module on agency, which draws from the indicators originally proposed by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and subsequent revisions. The following discussion draws largely on Ibrahim and Alkire (2007, p. 18-28).

Returning to Rowland's (1997) typology introduced above, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) select indicators related to power *over*, power *to*, power *with* and power *from within*, and address each in turn. The first indicator (power *over*) is concerned with the extent of control the respondent reports over personal decisions. The indicator seeks to establish the extent to which the respondent's agency is constrained by local power relations and patriarchal social hierarchies (Alsop *et al.* 2006, cited in Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, p. 19). The question derives from the *Moving Out of Poverty study* (Narayan 2007).

The second set of indicators (power *to*) includes the indicators of control and decision-making that have characterized most direct measurement of agency. For specific domains, the decision-making indicators denote the ability of respondents to take decisions (either alone or jointly), and further, whether or not they would be able to take decisions if they wanted to – in order to account for one's choice to *not* take decisions in a particular domain.⁸ It follows that if one is not taking decisions in a particular domain but feels he could if he wanted to, this response should be accorded the same weight as if the respondent was himself involved in the decision-making. In support of these indicators, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) note some evidence that they are internationally

⁸ The question regarding whether the respondent would *want* to take a choice within a domain was devised by Alsop *et al.* (2006).

comparable and that participatory studies – especially of women – signal that they consider household decision-making to be important (p. 21).⁹

In addition to these decision-making indicators, the proposed survey module also utilises the Relative Autonomy Index, developed within self-determination theory (SDT- Deci and Ryan 1985, Ryan *et al.* 1995, Ryan and Deci 2000). This seeks to add additional content to interpret the household decision-making responses. Alkire (2005) first noted that the concept of autonomy used in SDT was very closely related to Sen’s concept of agency, and therefore that the instruments they had developed to measure autonomy could prove useful in agency and empowerment studies.

Ryan and Deci define a person to be autonomous *when his or her behavior is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them. People are therefore most autonomous when they act in accord with their authentic interests or integrated values or desires.*¹⁰ As indicated by Alkire (2005), Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Alkire and Chirkov (2007), this is clearly in line with Sen’s conception of agency as acting on behalf of ‘what one values or has reason to value’. The index items are beneficial in shedding light on constraints to agency that may arise from sources outside the household; exploring motivations for choices made and whether they are congruent with the respondent’s values; and may illuminate changes over time in such motivations (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, p. 25). Moreover, this index has been shown to be robust internationally, as it appears equally applicable to the situation of groups in individual and collective societies and in vertical and horizontal cultures (Chirkov *et al.* 2003, 2005, cited in Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, p. 25).¹¹

Turning to Rowland’s third category, power *with*, the respondent is asked to signal whether or not she would like to change anything in her life, and if she replies yes, she are asked what she would like to change – this should illuminate the domains that are

⁹ Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) provide a table summarizing studies they reviewed that have included a household decision-making indicator (p. 21-22, Table 2).

¹⁰ This definition is from Alkire (2005, 2008), cited in Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, p. 25.

¹¹ Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) provide a list of studies in which the Relative Autonomy Index has been used (p. 26, Table 3).

important to her as an agent. The questions were initially proposed by Alsop *et al.* (2006) and fielded by Alkire in El Salvador and India.¹²

For Rowland's last category, power *from within*, the respondent is asked whether he feels he is able to change anything within his community *if he wants to* – this last clause is added to account for different degrees of motivation. Although this is a question referring to a collective (the locality in which one resides), note that the unit of analysis remains the individual. This question also comes from Alsop *et al.* (2006) and was fielded by Alkire (see footnote 12).

Finally, and departing from Rowland, a measure of global empowerment is included, to test further the supposition that empowerment ought to be measured only in the context of specific domains. We seek to test the extent to which domain-specific empowerment correlates with respondents' overall impressions of their empowerment – and whether empowerment in some domains appears more closely linked than in others. To this end, we ask a ladder question in which the respondent is asked to indicate her overall 'freedom and control over her life' on a ladder ranging from 1 to 10.

1.5 Our indicators of child agency¹³

Finally, we include a number of indicators that seek to measure child agency on the basis first that such agency is intrinsically important – and also to explore how the agency of parents may or may not be transmitted to their children. On the first point, there is some limited evidence. For instance, Fattore *et al.* (2009) explore the views of 178 Australian children as to what constitutes their wellbeing, and identify agency, alongside a positive sense of self and security; they consider agency to be a relational concept, embedded within parental boundaries. We have not been able to uncover any work exploring whether and how parents transmit agency to their children – but this is something we hope to address within the confines of the current study.

Of course the measurement of agency amongst children raises a number of issues, both ethical and conceptual. From a conceptual perspective the most important one is that the agency of children must be considered as embedded within physical, cognitive and

¹² <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~acgei/PDFs/Capabilities/Intro%20to%20the%20study.pdf>

¹³ The indicators in this section were devised for the purpose of this background paper.

parental boundaries. The fact that children may not aspire to bring about change in their communities, for instance, may not signal that they lack agency – simply that they are not yet mature enough to contemplate or realize such action. Similarly, the fact that parents take various decisions for their children should not in itself be interpreted as reflecting constraints on their agency. To accommodate these factors, for the young people in our sample, we seek to explore first whether they perceive themselves as autonomous actors by asking their views on whether they try hard, they can improve their situation in life, and whether they like to plan for the future (questions taken from the most recent round of the Young Lives survey)¹⁴. We then investigate whether the actions they take – regardless of who decides upon these actions – are congruent with what they value. We operationalize this concept by asking questions that seek to parallel the Ryan and Deci Relative Autonomy questions asked for their parents – but in simpler language and relating to pertinent domains – namely going to school or working for money (as relevant) and helping with tasks at home. Finally we ask child perceptions of father and mother autonomy support, again using a modified version of a scale developed by Ryan and Deci.¹⁵

3. Empirical Evidence

As discussed above, agency and empowerment matter both as an end of development and as a means to other development goals. When the researcher is interested in agency as an end, most likely, he/she will be interested in identifying the elements that can foster the agency role that is, the factors that may promote empowerment. On the other hand, when the researcher is interested in agency as a means to other goals, he/she needs to hypothesize the pathways through which this can occur and empirically test them. Many times, the researcher will be interested in both issues.

The empirical literature has attempted to analyse both the determinants and the impacts of agency. Moreover, there has been interest in the different levels of aggregation – micro, meso and macro – which obviously affect the types of agency indicators used. In all cases, establishing causality either for the determinants or for the effects of

¹⁴ <http://www.younglives.org.uk/research-methodology-data/questionnaires#eight>.

¹⁵ For the original scale, see: <http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/measures/parent.html>. The scale was modified with the help of Ed Deci.

empowerment poses a significant problem that has not always been addressed. Ideally causality analyses on agency should try to use randomized trials or natural experiments. However, this is not always possible and therefore one can make use of different econometric techniques, namely use of instrumental variables, structural equations or fixed effects (as appropriate) to avoid endogeneity problems due to the omission of a variable that affects both the outcome under analysis and the agency level (e.g., having an illness might both lower one's ability to take decisions and decrease the likelihood of participating in a credit program); selectivity (as for example in the evaluation of microcredit programs); or reverse causality (for example, is someone empowered because of his/her education or the other way around?).

In what follows we review the main results that have been obtained in studies of agency at the individual level.¹⁶ Moreover, we only consider those that have used direct measures of agency rather than 'proxies' given that, as we argue above, little can be learned from studies that equate agency with its potential determinants.¹⁷ We have organised the reviewed studies into the determinants or correlates of individual agency and the impact of the exercise of agency on development outcomes. The main characteristics and findings of the revised studies are summarised in a table in the Appendix.

¹⁶ Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) present five studies that aim at evaluating empowerment at different levels of aggregation and in different spheres (the state, the market and the society). The studies include: (a) the effect of a participatory budgeting initiative implemented in a number of municipalities in Brazil on developing the civil society's capacity for autonomous action; (b) the impact of the Women's Development Initiatives Project on women's empowerment; (c) the impact of the Honduras Community-Based Education Project on school-councils' decision-making authority and autonomy in relation to education authorities, as well as on the empowerment on different community members to participate and exercise agency in school council meetings; (d) the effect of the Kecamatan Development Project in Indonesia on building conflict management capacity of villagers through unexpected spillovers; and (e) the effect on the rural water supply and sanitation project on both collective and individual empowerment. Also, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) study the effects of affirmative action in India on policy decisions finding that women elected as leaders under the reservation policy invest more in the public goods more closely linked to women's concerns.

¹⁷ Malhotra *et al.* (2002) confront this problem. Reviewing 45 empirical studies of empowerment (25 from Asia, 7 from Africa and just 4 for Latin America), they conclude that "the vast majority of these studies do not measure empowerment effectively enough" to reach any firm conclusions regarding determinants and impacts (p. 34). Here our criteria are much more strict as we aim to focus only on direct measure of empowerment, however we do include a couple of studies which combine a direct measure with some sort of indirect measure (e.g., Kishor 2000).

3.1 Agency's determinants and correlates

Most frequently – and explicitly stated in Narayan's framework – it has been hypothesized that the control over material resources (such as land, livestock, and having labour earnings) is a strong determinant of agency. Other types of assets, human assets, such as education and health have also been argued to have a positive impact, as have socio-demographic characteristics (age, family size, family structure etc.). Even psychological characteristics have been put forth as determinants.¹⁸ Finally, social norms both formal and informal are recognised as relevant influences.

What does the evidence suggest? In general, all these factors have shown significant correlations with many direct indicators of individual (most frequently, married women's) agency. However, the relative importance of each of the factors varies across studies and contexts.

In most of these studies the observed evidence can only be used to make the case for *correlates* of agency rather than determinants given that causality is rarely specifically addressed. The majority of these studies use either the basic linear model (Ordinary Least Squares) or logit/probit models, depending on the nature of the dependent variable. Many rely on a binary dependent variable for women's agency; this is typically constructed from variables denoting whether the respondent is making choices in various domains (e.g., minor and major household purchases, employment, fertility); whether she enjoys freedom of movement; and at times, some measure of relations with her husband (whether they communicate or she fears him) or attitudinal variables (attitudes toward gender equality).¹⁹ Some studies used an ordinal variable, such as the number of domains in which the woman makes decisions. In such cases, typically multinomial or ordered logit or probit models are estimated. We were only able to find a couple of more technically sophisticated studies which estimated empowerment as a latent variable and employed some form of structural equation modelling, in an effort to rigorously control for endogeneity. The main correlates of empowerment the literature identifies are

¹⁸ In fact, Bandura (1995) – a psychologist – has demonstrated experimentally that beliefs about self-efficacy affect future performance.

¹⁹ As mentioned above, we sought to include inasmuch as possible only studies that employed what we consider to be 'direct' measures of agency. This wasn't always possible owing to a tendency in the literature to construct aggregates based on many relevant indicators. So we included a few studies that used 'mostly' direct indicators.

education, land ownership, labor market status, age, family structure and number of children, social norms and participation in micro-credit programs. Each of these is discussed in turn.

Education is the most frequently recurring determinant of empowerment; it appears as a significant correlate in virtually all the studies we examined. Using 2004 DHS data from Bangladesh, Kamal and Zunaid (2006) report that secondary school education has an important effect on women's ability to spend money on their own. Parveen and Leonhäuser (2004) also find support for the impact of education on women's agency in Bangladesh. Women's education was also found to significantly predict empowerment in Allendorf's (2007) study of Nepal. In Honduras, Speizer *et al.* (2005) find that having a primary education only is associated with male-centered decision-making attitudes and male centered decision-making amongst men and women in 2001 national survey data. Using DHS data on India, Gupta and Yesudian (2006) find that women's education is an important and consistent predictor of all the four dimensions of women's empowerment they consider: household autonomy, mobility, and attitudes toward gender and towards domestic violence. The study by Malhotra and Mather (1997) reaffirms this finding, as does Hindin (2000) on Zimbabwe. Finally, Jejeebhoy (2000) and Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) use multivariate analysis (OLS) to suggest that education was the most important determinant of autonomy in Tamil Nadu (India), and important (albeit less so) in more traditional Uttar Pradesh (India) and Punjab, Pakistan. In Tamil Nadu, all levels of education contributed to empowerment; in the North, only secondary education mattered. Roy and Niranjana (2004) reaffirm the importance of education to empowerment in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. The same two Indian states are also studied by Roy and Niranjana (2004), who reaffirm the positive impact of education on empowerment.

Land ownership is found to have a positive and significant impact on women's agency (as measured by their decision-making over household expenditures) by Mason (1998) in five Asian countries (Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines) as well as by Allendorf (2007) who analyses DHS data for Nepal.

Connection to the labor market also emerges as important, supporting the hypothesis that when women work outside the home, their contribution to the household

income enhances their decision-making power within the households. Receipt of a payment in kind is also a significant factor predicting empowerment in Allendorf's (2007) study of Nepal, while in a much earlier study of Nepal, Acharya and Bennett (1983) find that attachment to the market positively predicts "much greater power within the household in terms of their input into all aspects of household decision-making... confining women's work to the domestic and subsistence sectors reduces their power vis a vis men in the household" (p. ix). Using OLS modelling, they draw this connection from data on time use and a measure of empowerment that aggregates whether the woman is the sole or joint decision maker in three areas of household decision-making: farm management, domestic expenditure and expenditure decisions. Malhotra and Mather (1997) also point to employment as positively associated with women's decision making in financial matters in Kalatara (Sri Lanka) while Jejeebhoy (2000) and Jejeebhoy and Sathra (2001) signal a positive relationship in the areas they study in India and Pakistan, though they note that the relationship was much stronger in the Southern part of the sub-continent. Roy and Nirijan (2004) also find work status to be important in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. The effect of socio-economic status appears to be generally positive (see Malhotra and Mather 1997 on Sri Lanka, Parveen and Leonhäuser (2004) in Bangladesh, Speizer *et al.* (2005) on women in Honduras, Jejeebhoy (2000) on India, Jejeebhoy and Sathra (2001) on India and Pakistan, Gupta and Yesudian 2006 on India).

However, interestingly, assets (either material or human) are not always the correlates with the highest impact on direct measures of agency. Very frequently, variables that denote social norms, area of residence, or caste appear to be relatively more important. For example, Kamal and Zunaid (2006) find marital status to be the most significant predictor of agency in Bangladesh. Allendorf (2007) finds that women's place in the family structure is the most influential source of empowerment in Nepal: the odds ratio for being the wife of the household head (rather than a daughter-in-law or sister in-law) is not only significantly larger than all the others, but also many times the size of the others. Results by Jejeebhoy (2000) and Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) suggest the centrality of social institutions of gender within communities rather than religion or nationality. The first study compares south *vs.* north India Tamil Nadu *vs.* Uttar Pradesh, and the second one compares south India – Tamil Nadu – *vs.* north India and Pakistan,

with data from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab respectively. In both studies, the authors build on previous research that suggesting that social systems that characterize the southern regions of India provide women with more exposure to the outside world, more voice in family life and more freedom of movement than do the social systems of the north. In this view, region plays the major conditioning role, so that for example, two Muslim women in two different regions could display very different levels of agency. Results indicate that women from both northern sites – Uttar Pradesh and Punjab – fall significantly below women from Tamil Nadu in almost every measure of autonomy. Moreover, in Uttar Pradesh and in Punjab, factors related to social norms and tradition such as co-residence with mother-in-law, size of dowry, age, number and gender of the children were significantly correlated with agency indicators, while this was not the case in Tamil Nadu. Roy and Nirijan (2004) confirm the importance of social norms for (lack of) empowerment in Utttar Pradesh.

Results by Lokshin and Ravallion (2005) can also be interpreted as further evidence that resources are not a sufficient condition for empowerment. Using data from Russia in 1998 and 2000 on a global indicator of perceived agency (the power-ladder) and a global indicator of perceived economic welfare (the welfare-ladder), as well as on other traditional survey variables, they find that although there is a significant positive association between power ranks and welfare ranks, the match is far from perfect. Of the 240 people who put themselves on the highest welfare rung, more than half did not also place themselves on the highest power rung and of the group who put themselves on the lowest welfare rung, 24% did not also see themselves as the least powerful. That is, there are many people who do not think of themselves as poor but who nonetheless feel relatively powerless. This pattern holds both for men and women. When analysing correlates of each global measure, they find that these are essentially the same. Some of their results are worth commenting: income has a positive and significant effect for power and welfare. However, a simulation exercise of the impact of inequality suggests that even with complete equalization of incomes there is only a small drop in the proportion of respondents who rate themselves as being among the least powerful. Also, males tend to have higher perceived power while younger respondents feel that they have less power and perceive themselves as less affluent. Being unemployed lowers both

power and welfare, while education has a strong effect on both and the effect of education is almost twice as high for power as for welfare.

Apart from individual, household and cultural characteristics, researchers have been interested on whether participation in certain types of projects have been successful in fostering empowerment. Micro-credit programs – pioneered in Bangladesh through the Grameen bank – are the paradigmatic case.²⁰ A large number of studies have analysed the effects of involvement upon various empowerment indicators, and the findings are mostly very positive. Schuler and Hashemi (1994) find that participation in Bangladesh's Grameen Bank credit program had a significant positive effect on women's contraception use and empowerment (and spill-over effects on local non-participants in Grameen villages). They measured empowerment using a composite of the woman's economic security, mobility, ability to make small and larger purchases and major decisions, subjection to domination and violence, political/legal awareness, and participation in protests campaigns. They attribute the success of the credit program to its regimentation, and use of rules and rituals. Hashemi *et al.* (1996) conclude that, after controlling for several individual and household characteristics, "involvement in credit programs does empower women. Participation in Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) increases women's mobility, their ability to make purchases and major household decisions, their ownership of productive assets, their legal and political awareness and participation in public campaigns and protests... the programs also decrease women's vulnerability to family violence." Zaman (2000) employs a two-stage instrumental variable estimation to show that participation in BRAC positively affected the three factors he derived from 16 indicators of female empowerment ranging from knowledge and awareness of various social issues to ownership and control of assets and mobility. Kabeer (2001b) uses participatory methods and qualitative analysis to affirm the empowering potential of participation in micro-credit initiatives in Bangladesh. Finally, in a technically sophisticated study, Pitt *et al.* (2006) estimate empowerment as a latent variable on the basis of 75 individual variables using item response theory. They

²⁰ Two studies of micro-credit (Goetz and Gupta 1996 and Bhattacharya and Hulme 1996) argue that in fact loans are disempowering because women may not fully control their use; Zaman (2000) and Kabeer (2001) however find these arguments rest on the restrictive assumption that the loan is only empowering if the recipient alone takes decisions over its use.

obtain 10 factors of empowerment representing a variety of domains, from the ability to spend money to taking autonomous action on public and private matters. Using structural equation modeling to address self-selection bias, they find results “consistent with the view that women’s participation in micro credit programs helps to increase women’s empowerment. Credit programs lead to women taking a greater role in household decision making, having greater access to financial and economic resources, having greater social networks, having greater bargaining power vis-a-vis their husbands, and having greater freedom of mobility. They also tend to increase spousal communication in general about family planning and parenting concerns. The effects of male credit on women’s empowerment were generally negative” (p. 817).

To sum up, we find the following factors emerge in the literature as associated (and in some cases, determinants, where causation is established) of empowerment. Education, land ownership and participation in the market economy appear to be positively linked, as does participation in micro-credit programs. Religion and nationality does not appear to be an important predictor, while, particularly in more stratified and traditional societies, social norms (often proxied by area of residence) and institutions such as caste exercise a clear dampening role. In these more traditional contexts, age, family size and family structure (e.g., co-residence with in-laws, dowry) also assume greater importance.

3.2 Agency’s impacts on development outcomes

Less work still exists exploring the effects of agency on other development outcomes. The issue of female disempowerment has a special resonance for the intergenerational transmission of equality given that women, biologically and typically as primary caretakers, are more likely to affect the early outcomes of their children. Further, a large body of evidence suggests that women often demonstrate a higher marginal propensity to invest in their children than do men, meaning that policies seeking to empower women might have a stronger impact on child outcomes than those directed at men. In most of this research however, empowerment is proxied by indirect measures such as labor force

participation.²¹ For this reason, we do not consider it to be evidence of empowerment *per se* but rather of some changes in the status of women that might derive from empowerment or from some external factor. The issue still deserves more research, since there is also evidence of that these changes in female status might have adverse consequences²² that women may invest more in their sons than in their daughters,²³ and that men and women may simply invest *differently* in their children. Very few studies look at the impact of empowerment measured directly.

The theoretical evidence linking agency and outcomes suggests numerous potential relationships, namely involving some of the very same variables we considered above as determinants: education, employment prospects, etc. Indeed, as we have noted, often the direction of causation is unclear. The few studies we identified are concerned with health – and find generally positive effects of the empowerment of women upon their own health, demand for health and contraceptive use, and on the health of their children. Again, all but the final study rely upon logistic or OLS regression modeling and assume rather than prove causation. However, this may be less of a problem when investigating health-related outcomes – particularly those involving children – as it seems less plausible that they determine empowerment than might factors such as education or employment.

The first positive outcome we consider involves women's health indicators. Using 1994 DHS data for Zimbabwe, Hindin (2000) constructs a measure of empowerment that considers first whether a woman takes decisions with respect to major household purchases, whether she should work outside the home and the number of children she has – and second, whether she has a say in *any* of these three decisions. Then using logit and OLS modeling, respectively, she links a lack of empowerment with chronic energy

²¹ See, for instance, Cleland and Van Ginneken 1988; Doss 1996; Behrman and Deolalikar 1988, 1990; Strauss 1990; Thomas 1990; Thomas *et al.* 1991; Kishor 1993; Summers 1992, 1994; Hoddinott and Haddad 1995; Quisumbing *et al.* 1995; Jejeebhoy 1996; Desai and Alva 1998; Glewwe, 1999; Duflo 2003; World Bank 2001; Currie and Moretti, 2003; Pitt *et al.* 2003; Rubalcava *et al.* 2004; Chen and Li 2006; Behrman *et al.* 2009.

²² Basu and Basu (1991) using Indian data find that higher maternal employment is associated with higher child mortality, and they hypothesize that shortage of time among working women may be the major reason. At the same time, they find that the disadvantage to girls in survival seems to be smaller among working mothers. .

²³ Haddad and Hoddinott (1994) show that increases in cash income gained by women increase boy's height for weight relative to girls; Thomas (1997) find that sons of women with higher assets at marriage are less likely to experience respiratory disorders than their sisters.

deficiency (CED) and a low body mass index (BMI). Having no say in any of the decisions negatively affects these indicators while sole control of the husband has particularly acute effects: women's BMI were 10 percent less and they were 1.3 times more likely to have CED, with implications for their ability to care for themselves and others.

Empowerment may positively affect demand for and/or use of contraceptives (Al Riyami *et al.* 2004, Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996). The Al Riyami *et al.* study reports on analysis of a 2000 National Health Survey for Oman. They measure empowerment using a composite of two indicators: involvement in decision-making in 8 areas and freedom of movement. Empowered women are more likely to use contraception, however, using logistic regression analysis, they find that education and employment are much more important predictors of contraceptive use than empowerment (empowerment becomes insignificant in specifications combining the three variables). Empowerment emerges as a significant predictor of unmet contraceptive need (though education was a better predictor still). The Govindasamy and Malhotra study focuses on contraceptive use in Egypt using 1988 DHS data; they find that freedom of mobility and influence in non-reproductive dimensions result in higher contraceptive use.

Two studies assessed the effect of female empowerment upon their child's health. One found that it was positive (Kishor, 2000), while the other identified no effect (Allendorf 2007). Kishor (2000) takes 32 empowerment indicators from 1995/96 DHS data for Egypt and extracts 10 factors, which she labels as financial autonomy, participation in the modern sector, lifetime exposure to employment, sharing of roles and decision-making, family structure amenable to empowerment, equality in marriage, devaluation of women, women's emancipation, marital advantage and traditional marriage (Table 6.4, p. 137). Note these factors are derived from a combination of what we might label direct measures (e.g., decision-making ability, control of earnings) and indirect measures (education, time worked, possession of a bank account). In operationalizing empowerment, she is careful to include three elements: the *setting* of women's lives, women's access to potential *sources* of empowerment and *evidence* of empowerment. Using logistic regressions (with the child outcomes as the dependent variables) she finds that these empowerment measures, notably women's lifetime

exposure to employment, and family structure (denoting past & present residence with in-laws etc.), are negatively associated with infant mortality and positively associated with the probability of complete immunization of young children. Allendorf's (2007) study presents a counterpoint: while she finds that land ownership increases female empowerment and also child nutrition, she concludes that empowerment is not the mechanism through which this link occurs.

To sum up, empirical evidence of the effects of empowerment is very sparse, but suggests some tentative positive effects of empowerment on outcomes related to the health of empowered women and their children. There is an urgent need for further work on this issue, both to identify potential linkages, quantify the effects of empowerment versus other factors, and to elaborate upon the conditions under which empowerment does and does not translate into particular outcomes.

3. Conclusions

The preceding review has sought to give an overview of the literature on agency and on empowerment, as well as to explain and justify the approach we take to conceptualizing and measuring empowerment. We have discussed the main positions in the debate over what constitutes empowerment, what are its distinctive features and how it should be measured. We then outline the specific questions we use to measure the agency of both adults and their children. We then turned to the empirical evidence that uses what we consider to be appropriate measures of empowerment and summarized the findings on the determinants of empowerment and on its impacts.

The main findings of our review can be summarized as follows. On the conceptual side:

*We advocate a conception of agency that draws on Sen's approach and focuses particularly on an individual's ability to exert agency rather than considering both this individual factor with the institutional preconditions for the exercise of agency.

*We stress the need to take into account distinctive features of empowerment: namely its multidimensional nature (it can be experienced in different spheres and domains, and at different levels); its relational foundations; and the need to find a balance between internationally-comparable measures and those that are context specific.

*We advocate and justify the selection of a specific series of indicators of agency for adults (following Ibrahim and Alkire 2007) and for children (that were put together especially for this study, drawing heavily on self-determination theory).

In reviewing empirical studies of agency, we limit our focus to those that employ a direct measure of empowerment and find the following:

*Education emerges as an invariable correlate of empowerment in nearly all settings. Employment status was also positively associated with empowerment, as were land ownership, participation in a microcredit program and socio-economic status.

*Religion and nationality do not appear to be an important predictors of agency, while, particularly in more stratified and traditional societies, social norms (often proxied by area of residence) and institutions such as caste exercise a clear dampening role. In these more traditional contexts, age, family size and family structure (e.g., co-residence with in-laws, dowry) also assume greater importance.

*The very few studies we identified that explored the impact of direct measures of empowerment are concerned with health – and find generally positive effects of the empowerment of women upon their own health, demand for contraception and contraceptive use, and on the health of their children (mortality and immunization).

Through our review, we identified a number of gaps in the literature that we will attempt to redress in the paper that follows. First, we were surprised by a dearth of studies of the determinants and impact of empowerment overall but particularly in Latin America; accordingly we are convinced that this topic merits attention. Second, we found very few studies that considered seriously and sought to control for potential endogeneity; most of the studies note a positive association between an individual's characteristics and her empowerment level, and assume that the relationship is causal, and similarly between empowerment and an 'outcome'. There is a need for studies that seek to control rigorously for endogeneity, as we will attempt to do. Third, we were unable to uncover any studies that sought to model the effect of parental agency upon the agency of their children, a transmission mechanism that seems to us fundamental given the intrinsic and instrumental character of agency. Fourth, of the outcomes we did discover, most of them pertain to early childhood – e.g., to mortality or to immunization; very few pertain to outcomes among a slightly older population. By focusing our

attention on young people 12 and up, we hope to investigate this important issue. Finally, we were unable to uncover any quantitative studies focusing on the intergenerational transmission of agency. One clear reason is a lack of panel data on empowerment. The dataset we will employ on this paper is in fact cross-sectional but we have tried to account for the stringent data needs of work on intergenerational transmission by asking questions of three different generations (the parents, the parent's perceptions of their parents, and the parents' children). We will explore whether this data collection exercise proves adequate for addressing the challenges at hand.

4. References

- Acharya, M. and L. Bennett. 1983. *Women and the Subsistence Sector: Economic Participation and Household Decision-making in Nepal*. Working Paper Number 526. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Al Riyami A.A., M. Afifi and R. Mabry (2004), *Women's empowerment in Oman and its influence on contraceptive use*. *Reproductive health matters* 12:23, p. 144–54.
- Alkire, S. (2005) *Subjective quantitative studies of human agency*, *Social Indicators Research*, 74 (1), pp. 217-60.
- Alkire, S. (2008), "Concepts and Measures of Agency," OPHI Working Papers ophiwp010, University of Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House.
- Alkire, S. and V. Chirkov (2007), "Testing a New Indicator in Kerala", in Pillai, N. V. and A. Alkire (2007), "Measuring Individual Agency or Empowerment: A Study in Kerala", Chapter 4. MPRA Paper No. 9289. <http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/9289/>
- Alkire, S. V. Chirkov and S. Silva Leander (mimeo), *Indicating Agency*. Paper presented in the 2006 HDCA conference 'Freedom and Justice', Groningen, The Netherlands.
- Allendorf, K. (2007), "Do Women's Land Rights Promote Empowerment and Child Health in Nepal?", *World Development* 35 (11): 1975-1988.
- Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M. and Holland, J. (2006) *Empowerment in Practice From Analysis to Implementation* (Washington, D.C., World Bank).

- Alsop, R. & Heinsohn, N. (2005), *Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators*, Policy Research Working Paper (World Bank).
- Bandura, A. (1995). *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Basu, A. M., and K. Basu. 1991. Women's Economic Roles and Child Survival: The Case of India. *Health Transition Review* 1, p. 83-103.
- Beegle, K., E. Frankenberg and D. Thomas. 2001. "Bargaining power Within Couples and Use of Prenatal and Delivery Care in Indonesia." *Studies in Family Planning* 32:2, p. 30-146.
- Behrman, J.R. and A.B. Deolalikar (1988), Health and nutrition In: H. Chenery and T.N. Srinivasan, Editors, *Handbook of Development Economics*, Amsterdam, North Holland.
- Behrman, J.R., and A.B. Deolalikar (1990), "The intrahousehold demand for nutrients in rural south India: Individual estimates, fixed effects, and permanent income", *The Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 25:4, p. 665 – 696.
- Behrman, J.R., M.C. Calderon, S. Preston, J. Hoddinott, R. Martorell and A. D. Stein, 2009, "Nutritional Supplementation of Girls Influences the Growth of their Children: Prospective Study in Guatemala," Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.
- Chattopadhyay, R., and E., Duflo (2004), "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India," *Econometrica*, 72, 1409-43.
- Chen, Y. & H. Li, 2006. "Mother's Education and Child Health: Is There a Nurturing Effect?," Discussion Papers 00021, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Department of Economics.
- Chirkov, V., Ryan, R., Kim, Y. and Kaplan, U. (2003) Differentiating Autonomy from Individualism and Independence: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Internalization of Cultural Orientations and Well-Being, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (1), pp. 97-110.
- Chirkov, V., Ryan, R. M. and Willness, C. (2005) Cultural Context and Psychological Needs in Canada and Brazil: Testing a Self-Determination Approach to the Internalization of Cultural Practices, Identity, and Well-Being, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 36, pp. 423-443.

- Cleland, J. & Van Ginneken, J. K. (1988) “Maternal education and child survival in developing countries: the search for pathways of influence”, *Social Sci. Med.* 27, 1327.
- Currie, J. and E. Moretti, 2003, “Mother’s Education and the Intergenerational Transmission of Human Capital: Evidence from College Openings”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118:4, p. 1495-1532.
- Desai, S. and S. Alva (1998), “Maternal education and child health: Is there a strong causal relationship?”, *Demography* 35:1, p. 71-81.
- Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. (1985) *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior* (New York, Plenum Publishing Co.).
- Doss, Cheryl (1996). *A Women’s Bargaining Power in Household Economic Decisions: Evidence from Ghana*, Staff Paper Series, Department of Applied Economics, University of Minnesota.
- Duflo, E. (2003), “Grandmothers and granddaughters: Old age pension and intra-household allocation in South Africa”, *World Bank Economic Review* 17:1, p. 1-25.
- Estudillo, J. P., A. R. Quisumbing, and K. Otsuka. 2001. “Gender Differences in Land Inheritance, Schooling and Lifetime Income: Evidence from the Rural Philippines.” *Journal of Development Studies* 37(4):23-48.
- Fattore, T., J. Mason and E. Watson (2008), “When Children are Asked About Their Well-being: Towards a Framework for Guiding Policy”, *Child Indicators Research* 2:1, p. 57-77.
- Glewwe, P. (1999), Why does mother's schooling raise child health in developing countries: Evidence from Morocco. *The Journal of Human Resources* 34:1, p. 124–136.
- Glewwe, P. and G. Hall (1998), “Are some Groups More Vulnerable to Macro-Economic Shocks than Others? Hypothesis Tests Using Panel Data from Peru”. *Journal of Development Economics* 56 (1): 181-206.
- Goetz A.M. & Sen Gupta R. (1996), ‘Who Takes the Credit? Gender, Power and Control Over Loan Use in Rural Credit Programme in Bangladesh’, *World Development*, 24, (1), p. 45-63.

- Govindasamy, P. and A. Malhotra (1996), "Women's Position and Family Planning in Egypt", *Studies in Family Planning* 27 (6): 328-340.
- Gupta, K. and P. P. Yesudian (2006), "Evidence of women's empowerment in India: a study of socio-spatial disparities", *Geojournal* 65:4, p. 365-380.
- Haddad, L. & Hoddinott, J., 1994. "Women's income and boy-girl anthropometric status in the Cote d'Ivoire," *World Development*, Elsevier, vol. 22(4), pages 543-553, April.
- Hashemi, S. M., S.R. Schuler, and A. P. Riley. 1996. "Rural Credit Programs and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh." *World Development* 24:4, p. 635-653.
- Hindin, M. J. (2000), "Women's Power and Anthropometric Status in Zimbabwe". *Social Science and Medicine* 51:1517-1528.
- Hoddinott, J. & Haddad, L., 1995. "Does Female Income Share Influence Household Expenditures? Evidence from Cote d'Ivoire," *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, Department of Economics, University of Oxford, vol. 57(1), pages 77-96, February.
- Ibrahim, S. and S. Alkire (2007), "Empowerment and agency: A proposal for internationally-comparable indicators", *Oxford Development Studies* 35:4, p. 379-403.
- Isvan, N. 1991. Productive and reproductive decisions in Turkey: The role of domestic bargaining. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (November): 1057-1070.
- Jejeebhoy S.J. (1996) *Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour—A Review of the Evidence from India*. Working Paper No. 3. Washington, D.C., International Center for Research on Women.
- Jejeebhoy, S.J. (2000), "Women's autonomy in rural India: Its dimensions, determinants and the influence of context.", In H. Presser and G. Sen (Eds), *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Beyond Cairo*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jejeebhoy S.J. and Z.A. Sathar (2001), "Women's Autonomy in India and Pakistan: The Influence of Religion and Region", *Population & Development Review* 27, p. 687-712.
- Kabeer, N. (2001a) Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment- Theory

- and Practice, in: *Discussing women's empowerment-theory and practice* (Stockholm, Novum Grafiska AB).
- Kabeer, N. (2001b), "Conflicts Over Credit: Re-Evaluating the Empowerment Potential of Loans to Women in Rural Bangladesh", *World Development* 29:1, p. 63-84.
- Kamal, N. and K.M. Zunaid (2006), *Education and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh*, Working Paper 11, Independent University, Bangladesh: Centre for Health, Population and Development (CHPD).
- Kaufman, A. (2006), "Capabilities and freedom", *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 14:3, p. 289-300.
- Kishor, S. 1993. "May God Give Sons to All: Gender and Child Mortality in India." *American Sociological Review* 58:247-65
- Kishor, S.. 1995. *Autonomy and Egyptian Women: Findings from the 1988 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey*. Occasional Papers 2. Calverton, Md.: Macro International Inc.
- Kishor, S.. 2000. "Empowerment of Women in Egypt and Links to the Survival and Health of Their Infants." In *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo*. Harriet Presser and Gita Sen, eds. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lokshin, M. and M. Ravallion (2005) "Self-Rated Power and Welfare in Russia", in: D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Malhotra, A. and M. Mather. 1997. "Do Schooling and Work Empower Women in Developing Countries? Gender and Domestic Decisions in Sri Lanka." *Sociological Forum* 12(4), p. 599-630.
- Malhotra, A. and S. Shuler (2005), "Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development." In *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. 71-88. Narayan, D. ed. Washington D.C.: World Bank, Gender and Development Group.
- Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R. and Boender, C. (2002) *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development* (Washington, DC, The World Bank).
- Mason, K. 1998. "Wives' Economic Decision-making Power in the Family: Five Asian

- Countries.” p. 105-133 in *The Changing Family in Comparative Perspective: Asia and the United States*. Karen Oppenheim Mason, ed. Honolulu: East-West Center.
- Mason, K. and H. L. Smith (2000), “Husbands’ versus Wives Fertility Goals and Use of Contraception: The Influence of Gender Context in Five Asian Countries”. *Demography* 37:3, p. 299-311.
- Mason, K. O. 2005. “Measuring Women’s Empowerment: Learning from Cross-National Research.” Pp. 89-102 in *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Deepa Narayan. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Mason, K. and H. L. Smith. 2000. “Husbands’ versus Wives Fertility Goals and Use of Contraception: The Influence of Gender Context in Five Asian Countries.” *Demography* 37(3):299-311.
- Mason, K. O. and Smith, H. (2003) *Women’s Empowerment and Social Context: Results from Five Asian Countries* (Washington, DC, Gender and Development Group, World Bank).
- Montgomery R, D Bhattacharya and D Hulme (1996) ‘*Credit For The Poor In Bangladesh: The BRAC Rural Development Programme and the Government Thana Resource Development and Employment Programme*’ in Hulme D and P Mosely ‘Finance against Poverty’, Vols. 1 and 2, Routledge, London.
- Narayan, D. (2005) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington, The World Bank).
- Narayan, D. (2002) *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction* (Washington, DC, World Bank).
- Narayan, D. and P. Petesch (Eds.) (2007), *Moving out of poverty*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Parveen, S. and I. Leonhäuser (2004), “Empowerment of Rural Women in Bangladesh-A Household Level Analysis”, Conference on Rural Poverty Reduction through Research for Development and Transformation. <http://www.tropentag.de/2004/abstracts/full/382.pdf>
- Petesich, P., Smulovitz, C. and Walton, M. (2005), *Evaluating Empowerment: A Framework with Cases from Latin America*, in: *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington, D.C., The World Bank), pp. 219- 246.

- Pillarisetti, J. and M. McGillivray (1998), "Human Development and gender empowerment: methodological and measurement issues", *Development Policy Review* 16:2, p. 197-203.
- Pitt, M., S. Khandker, O. Choudhury, and D. Millimet. 2003. "Credit Programs for the Poor and the Health Status of Children in Rural Bangladesh." *International Economic Review* 44 (February): 87–118.
- Pitt, M., S. R. Khandker and J. Cartwright (2006), "Empowering women with micro finance: Evidence from Bangladesh", *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 54, p. 791-831.
- Psacharopoulos, G. and H. Patrinos (1994), *Indigenous People and Poverty in Latin America: An Empirical Analysis*. Washington, DC.: World Bank.
- Quisumbing, A. R., Brown, L. R., Sims Feldstein, H., Haddad, L., & Peña, C. (1995). Women: The key to food security. [Food policy statement]. Available from <http://www.unfpa.org/modules/intercenter/food/>.
- Rowlands, J. (1997) *Questioning Empowerment* (Oxford, Oxfam).
- Roy, T. K. and S. Niranjana (2004), "Indicators of Women's Empowerment in India". *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 19 (3).
- Rubalcava, L., Teruel, G. and D. Thomas (2004), *Spending, saving and public transfers paid to women* (Rep. No. 024-04), California Center for Population Research, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.
- Ryan, R. M. and E.L. Deci (2000), "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being ", *American Psychologist*, 55:1.
- Ryan, R. M. and E.L. Deci (2001), "On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52.
- Rowland, J. (1997), *Questioning empowerment*, Oxford: Oxfam.
- Schuler, S. R. and S. M. Hashemi (1994), "Credit Programs, Women's Empowerment, and Contraceptive Use in Rural Bangladesh". *Studies in Family Planning* 25(2):65-76.

- Schuler, S. R., S. M. Hashemi and H. Pandit. 1995a. *Beyond Credit: SEWA's Approach to Women's Reproductive Lives in Urban India*. JSI Research Report.
- Schuler, S. R., A. Hendrix Jenkins and J. W. Townsend. 1995b. *Credit, Women's Status and Fertility Regulation in Urban Market Centers of Bolivia*. JSI Working Paper No. 8. Washington: John Snow, Inc.
- Sen, A.K. (1979). Utilitarianism and Welfarism. *The Journal of Philosophy* 76(9), p. 463-489.
- Sen, A.K. (1985). Well-being, Agency and Freedom. *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXXII, pp. 169-221.
- Sen, A.K. (1987). "The standard of living", in G. Hawthorn (Ed.) *The Standard of Living*. pp. 1-38 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Sen, A. (1990) More than 100 million women are missing, *New York Review of Books*, 20 December, pp. 61–66.
- Sen, A. K. (1992) *Inequality Re-examined* (Oxford, Clarendon Press).
- Sen, A.K. (1993). Positional Objectivity. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22(2), pp. 126-145.
- Sen, Amartya (1999), *Development as Freedom*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Sen, A.K. (2002). Health: Perception versus Observation. *British Medical Journal* 324(7342), p. 860-861.
- Schuler, S.R and S.M. Hashemi (1994), "Credit programs, women's empowerment and contraceptive use in rural Bangladesh", *Studies in family planning* 25, p. 65-76.
- Speizer, I. S., L. Whittle and M. Carter (2005), "Gender relations and reproductive decision-making in Honduras", *International Family Planning Perspectives* 31:3, p. 131–139.
- Strauss, J. (1990), Households, communities, and preschool children's nutrition outcomes: evidence from rural Cote d'Ivoire, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 38:2, pp. 231–261.
- Summers, L. H. 1992. Investing in all the people. *Pakistan Development Review* 31 (4) (Winter): 367-406.

- Summers, L. H. 1994. *Investing in all the people: Educating women in developing countries*. Economic Development Institute Seminar Paper No. 45. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Thomas, D. (1990) Intrahousehold Resource Allocation: An Inferential Approach, *Journal of Human Resources*, 25, pp. 635-664.
- Thomas, D., Strauss, J., and Henriques, M. (1991), "How does mother's education affect child height?" *Journal of Human Resources* 26(2): 183-211.
- Thomas, D. (1997) Incomes, Expenditures, and Health Outcomes: Evidence on Intrahousehold Resource Allocation, in: L. Haddad et al (eds.) *Intrahousehold Resource Allocation in Developing Countries: Models, Methods, and Policy* (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press).
- World Bank (2001) *World Development Report 2001: Attacking Poverty* (New York, Oxford University Press).
- Zaman, H. (2000), "Assessing the Poverty and Vulnerability Impact of Micro-Credit in Bangladesh: A case study of BRAC".
<http://www.worldbank.org/html/dec/Publications/Workpapers/wps2000series/wps2145/wps2145.pdf>

5. Appendix: Summary table of reviewed studies on agency and empowerment

Note: The articles were selected on the basis that (a) studied aspects of individual agency and (b) used direct indicators of agency.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Acharya and Bennet (1983)	Nepal. Data collected by authors in 7 villages.	Women's status (as measured by household decision-making)	Household decision-making	OLS	Women's participation in the market economy increases their household decision making. Women in the more orthodox Hindu communities -largely confined to domestic and subsistence production- have lower decision-making. than women in Tibeto-Burman communities. Results also indicate that Tibeto-Burman women have lower birth rates than Hindu women, perhaps due to their greater economic security and availability of alternate female role models.
Schuler and Hashemi (1994)	Bangladesh. 1992 Survey data.	Women's contraception use and empowerment	Composite of the woman's economic security, mobility, ability to make small and larger purchases and major decisions, subjection to domination and violence, political/legal awareness, and participation in protests campaigns.	Logit Model	Participation in Bangladesh's Grameen Bank credit program had a significant positive effect on women's contraception use and empowerment.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Govindasamy and Malhotra (1996)	Egypt 1988 DHS	Current use of contraceptives and the role women think they should play in fertility decisions	Women's position within household is measured by: Women's freedom of movement; women's perception of their weight in household decisions; women's opinion on who should control the household budget.	Logit and Multinomial Logit Model	Agency indicators have a positive impact on women's attitudes about family planning. This influence is above and beyond the effect of education and employment. However, the results show that each of the three considered indicators of agency do not affect family planning decisionmaking preferences in the same manner or to a similar degree, suggesting that women's agency is indeed multidimensional. Also, freedom of mobility and influence in non-reproductive dimensions have a positive impact on contraceptive use.
Hashemi, Schuler, Riley (1996)	Bangladesh Data collected in 1992	Empowerment	Binary variable with value one if the woman had a 'positive score' (a value of one) in five out of eight indicators of agency. They eight indicators refer to mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, ability to make larger purposes, involvement in major household decisions, relative freedom from domination within the family, political and legal awareness and involvement in political campaigning and protests.	Logit Model	After controlling for several individual and household characteristics, involvement in credit programs does empower women.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Malhotra and Mather (1997)	Kalatarra- Sri Lanka Author's data collection 1992	Empowerment	Decision-making (solely or jointly) in financial matters Decision-making (solely or jointly) in 'social and organisational' matters.	Logit regression	Women's education and employment were highly associated with their control over financial matters, while a more complex set of factors related to a women's stage in the life course and her family structure were more associated with their control over social and organisational matters
Mason (1998)	Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines Author's data collection 1993-1994.	Empowerment	Six-item scale indicator referred to women's say in household economic decisions (major purchases, her employment, sari or jewelry)	OLS	Land ownership is associated with greater economic power
Zaman (2000)	Bangladesh, Matlab district. Data collected by the author. 1995	Empowerment	Three factors derived from 16 indicators of female empowerment ranging from knowledge and awareness of various social issues to ownership and control of assets and mobility	Two-stage instrumental variable estimation.	Participation in Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) positively affect empowerment.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Jejeebhoy (2000)	Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, India. Data collected by author, 1993-94.	Empowerment	Economic decision-making (participation of women in purchase of food, major household goods, jewelry); child-related decision-making (extent to which women takes decisions on what to do if child falls ill, discipline, how much to educate children, and type of schooling); freedom of movement (the number of places that a woman can go unescorted); freedom from threat (fear of and/or beatings from husband), access to economic resources (having a say in household purchases, having cash, and freedom to make small purchases/gifts).	OLS	Education was the most important determinant of autonomy in Tamil Nadu but less so in Uttar Pradesh. In the latter, factors such as co-residence with mother-in-law, size of dowry and household economic status were more important. Economic activity was had a significantly positive effect on autonomy in both states but the influence was far stronger in Uttar Pradesh where far fewer women worked
Mason and Smith (2000)	Data obtained from 56 purposively-selected communities in Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines in 1993 and 1994.	Empowerment	Different types of indicators (binary, three point and six point scale) based on women's say in household economic decisions (major purchases and whether to work outside home), family-size decisions, ability to go to places unescorted, whether or not woman needs permission to go anywhere outside home, whether women are afraid to disagree with their husband for fear of his anger, whether husband ever beat or hit woman.	OLS and logit model	Country and community of residence predict women's domestic empowerment better than their personal socioeconomic and demographic traits.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Hindin (2000)	Zimbabwe-1994 DHS	BMI and chronic energy deficiency-CED (BMI<18.5) (as outcomes)	Dummy variables on who makes decisions on: a) major household purchases b) whether the woman should work outside home c) number of children A dummy variable on whether they had a say in <i>any</i> of the decisions (a, b, c).	Logit model (for CED) OLS model (for BMI)	Women who have no say in any of the decisions tend to have lower BMI and higher probability of CED. when the husbands have sole control in different domains, women are up to 10% thinner, and up to 1.93 times more likely to have CED. This, in turn, can lead to poorer reproductive outcomes as well as a decreased capacity to produce food for themselves and their families.
		Empowerment		Logit Model	Younger age Less education Not earning cash income Someone else (nor husband nor wife) being the household head Being Ndebele-speaking (as opposed to Shona-speaking)
Kishor (2000)	Egypt. 1995/96 DHS	Infant mortality Complete immunization of young children.	Extracts 10 factors 32 from empowerment indicators: financial autonomy, participation in the modern sector, lifetime exposure to employment, sharing of roles and decision-making, family structure amenable to empowerment, equality in marriage, devaluation of women, women's emancipation, marital advantage and traditional marriage	Logit Model	Empowerment measures, notably women's lifetime exposure to employment, and family structure (denoting past & present residence with in-laws etc.), are negatively associated with infant mortality and positively associated with the probability of complete immunization of young children

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Jejeebhoy and Sathra (2001)	Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, India and Punjab, Pakistan. Data collected by authors, 1993-1994.	Empowerment	Economic decision-making (participation of women in purchase of food, major household goods, jewelry); child-related decision-making (extent to which women takes decisions on what to do if child falls ill, discipline, how much to educate children, and type of schooling); freedom of movement (the number of places that a woman can go unescorted); freedom from threat (fear of and/or beatings from husband), access to economic resources (having a say in household purchases, having cash, and freedom to make small purchases/gifts)	OLS	Find traditional sources to be more important determinants of autonomy in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh than in Tamil Nadu – namely, co-residence with mother in law, size of dowry, age, and number/gender of children. In Tamil Nadu, the only traditional factor that mattered was age. Education and work status predicted empowerment in all three sites but far more in Tamil Nadu than in UP and Punjab, where only secondary education mattered. The authors explored also the roles of nationality, religion and region – and found that only the last of these was important; they consider region to proxy the cultural context, namely prevailing social institutions that condition gender.
Al Riyami, Afifi and Mabry (2004)	Oman, 2000 National Health Survey	Use of contraception	A composite of two indicators: involvement in decision-making in 8 areas and freedom of movement.	Logit Model	Empowered women are more likely to use contraception, however, using logistic regression analysis, they find that education and employment are much more important predictors of contraceptive use than empowerment

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Parveen and Leonhäuser (2004)	Bangladesh (Mymensingh) Data collected by the authors in 2003.	Empowerment	Six indicators of empowerment: contribution to household income, access to resources, asset ownership, participation in household decision-making, perception on gender awareness coping capacity to household shocks. A cumulative empowerment index (CEI) was developed adding the obtained scores of six empowerment indicators.	OLS	Strong positive effects of formal and non-formal education, information media exposure and spatial mobility on women's CEI, while traditional socio-cultural norms had a strong negative effect.
Roy and Niranjana (2004)	India- Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh 1998-99 National Family Health Survey	Empowerment	Decision making, mobility and access to economic resources	Logit Regression.	Education and work participation of women show a strong association with the direct indicators of autonomy. However, there are sociocultural variations in the level of empowerment. Women in Uttar Pradesh have the least autonomy in freedom of movement.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Agency	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Speizer, Whittle and Carter (2005)	Honduras, 2001 National surveys.	Male centered decision-making attitudes' (E.g., Disempowerment	They use measures of disempowerment: 1) Male-centered decisionmaking attitudes: Measure of whether men should make decisions alone regarding family size and family planning use (binary) 2) Male-centered reproductive decisionmaking: Measures who actually took decisions in household in these areas (binary) Measures are binary: if men alone 'should take' or 'took' decisions, coded as 1, if woman or man and woman jointly than 0.	Logit Model	Both men and women are more likely to be in favour of male-centred decision-making if they have less than secondary education and live in a consensual union. In the case of women, having no-children, being of medium or low socioeconomic status and living in a rural area was also correlated with male-centered decision-making attitudes. only primary education or less.
Lokshin and Ravallion (2005)	Russia Data collected by authors, 1998-2000	Perceived Global Empowerment and Perceived Global Economic Welfare	Perceived Global Empowerment (power-ladder)	Ordered Probit	Many people who do not think of themselves as poor nonetheless feel relatively powerless. Correlates of each global measure are essentially the same. Income has a positive and significant effect for power and welfare. A simulation exercise of the impact of inequality suggests that even with complete equalization of incomes there is only a small drop in the proportion of respondents who rate themselves as being among the least powerful. Males tend to have higher perceived power while younger respondents feel that they have less power and perceive themselves as less affluent. Being unemployed lowers both power and welfare, while education has a strong effect on both and the effect of education is almost twice as high for power as for welfare

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Empowerment	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Pitt, Khandker and Cartwright (2006)	Bangladesh, 1998/99 survey by BIDS and World Bank	Empowerment	Estimate empowerment as latent variable on the basis of 75 indicators using item response theory. They obtain 10 factors of empowerment representing the following aspects: “(1) purchasing: ability to spend money independently and to make household purchases; (2) resource: general economic power and access to funds; (3) finance: power regarding household borrowing and ability to borrow from informal sources; (4) transaction management: balance of power relating to decision, implementation, and spending for household; (5) mobility and networks: freedom of movement, development of networks, relationships with blood kin and in-laws; (6) activism: awareness of law and politics, autonomous action on public and private matters; (7) household attitudes: attitudes on women’s empowerment, dowry, and status within household; (8) husband’s behavior: husband’s actions and opinions pertaining to women’s status; (9) fertility and parenting: decisions and action for family planning and child rearing; and (10) all variables: general women’s empowerment encompassing all nine of the above thematic groups.	Structural equation modelling.	Women’s participation in micro credit programs helps to increase women’s empowerment. Credit programs lead to women taking a greater role in household decision making, having greater access to financial and economic resources, having greater social networks, having greater bargaining power vis-a-vis their husbands, and having greater freedom of mobility. They also tend to increase spousal communication in general about family planning and parenting concerns. The effects of male credit on women’s empowerment were generally negative.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Empowerment	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Gupta, and Yesudian (2006)	India -1998-99 DHS	Empowerment	Household autonomy, mobility, and attitudes toward gender and towards domestic violence	Logit regression	Women's education is an important and consistent predictor of all dimensions of women's empowerment. Age and media exposure are positively associated with freedom of movement and attitudes of gender equality. Household standard of living predicts household autonomy and gender equality, while age and education alone are negatively associated with attitudes to domestic violence
Kamal and Zunaid (2006)	Bangladesh-2004 –DHS data	Empowerment	Binary variable on whether women are able to spend their money on their own. Index of woman's decision- making ability (sum of whether takes decision in 7 areas, with weights determined by principal components analysis). Index of woman's mobility (whether free to go to 3 places, with weights determined by PCA).	Logit Regression	Marital status is the most significant predictor of empowerment. Secondary education is also important.

Authors	Country and year of the data collection	Outcome of interest	Indicators of Empowerment	Empirical Approach	Main Findings
Allendorf (2007)	Nepal-2001 DHS	Children's severe underweight (as an outcome)	<p>An ordinal variable ranging 1-4: total number of decisions in which a woman usually has the final say alone or jointly. The four areas are: her own health care, making large household purchases; making household purchases for daily needs, and visiting family, friends, and relatives</p> <p>A dummy variable denoting whether the respondent usually has the final say alone (rather than jointly) on at least one of the four decisions.</p>	Logit Model	Land ownership has a positive impact on children's nutrition. However, the results do not support empowerment as a major pathway from women's land rights to better child nutrition.
		Empowerment		Logit and Ordered Probit Model	Positive impact of landownership on both measures of empowerment. They also find that other sources and settings of empowerment such whether they receive payment in kind, their level of education, whether they own livestock, their caste and ethnicity and whether they are the wives in the household (rather than a daughter-in-law or sister in-law) as are also associated with greater empowerment.