



DOI: 10.1515/hssr -2016-0003

Women's Status among Households in Southern Ethiopia: Survey of Autonomy and Power

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Abstract

This study examined two key dimensions of women's status (autonomy and intimate partners violence) in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia based on regional data collected from five randomly selected zones and one city administration; namely, Sidama, Hadya, Gamo Gofa, South Omo, Bench Maji and Hawassa City Administration. The analysis revealed that while joint decision is fairly high, women's independent decision making on key household domains is generally low. Significant proportions of women in the region are exposed to violence by their partners ranging from insult to heavy physical injury. The fact that nearly half of the women experienced insult and close to a quarter of them faced beating is indicative of the low status of women in society. The regression analysis indicated that seven variables determine the occurrence of violent acts against women in the study area, namely household size, education, access to radio, value of children index, wealth index and level of women autonomy. On the other hand, decision making autonomy is affected by wealth status, household size, access to radio and sex preference index. Finally, the study highlighted the importance of

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addressing the limited technical and operational capacities to implement gender policy and legal frameworks effectively and efficiently.

Keywords

Ethiopia, Women status, Violence, Education, Autonomy

1. Background

The term “women status” is defined and understood in different ways depending upon contexts. Some authors focus on women’s prestige, that is, on the respect or esteem that is accorded to women by virtue of their gender. Other authors (e.g. Dyson and Moore, 1983) focus on women’s power or freedom from control by others, especially within the family or household. Dixon (1978) defines the term as “the degree of women’s access to (and control over) material resources (including food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power, and prestige) within the family, in the community, and in the society at large.

Recent studies have viewed women status in terms of disparities in autonomy and their power status including their exposure to domestic violence (e.g. Goleen, 2015). The concept of women’s autonomy is usually defined as women’s ability to negotiate and carry out their preferences within marriage (Ghuman, Lee and Smith 2006; Smith et al. 2003). Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, family violence and intimate partner violence (IPV), is a power issue, and it is generally understood as a pattern of abusive behavior by one or both partners in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, friends or cohabitation (Garcia-Moreno, 2006).

There are several strategies in use to measure women autonomy, each having its own limitations. One of the earliest and most commonly used is the aggregate decision making index, formed on the basis of many autonomy measures used in surveys (Dyson and Moore, 1983). One problem with these measures is that they often aggregate very different types and magnitudes of decisions (Goleen and Anne, 2015). Some studies use women’s spatial mobility as a proxy measure of autonomy, mostly assuming that greater mobility may indicate greater autonomy (Mumtaz and Salway, 2009). A third strategy for measuring autonomy is

to examine financial control over personal assets (Goleen and Anne, 2015; Anderson and Eswaran, 2009). Women who have their own personal financial resources and/or a greater say in household finances are often more autonomous in other areas of life (Sabarwal et al., 2014). Other researchers also use women's socioeconomic status (such as education, employment) as a proxy for autonomy.

No doubt that gender disparities in autonomy and power limit the women's ability to participate in development and contribute to improved living standards for their families (King and Mason, 2001). In turn, access to productive resources, control over these resources and receiving benefits from the use of the resources, are all significant factors in determining gender impacts on household wellbeing and development activities. According to Blumberg (2005), boosting women's relative control of income and other economic resources has so many consequences that they positively enhance both gender equality and development (Blumberg, 2005). For example, the positive effects of women's autonomy on child survival and nutritional status are particularly well documented (Caldwell 1986; Mason 1984).

Previous studies have documented several factors associated with women's low autonomy and IPV at households. These factors usually revolve around women's characteristics, household characteristics and husbands' socio economic status. Women's education is the most frequently reported variable in previous studies (Bloom et al., 2001; Sultana, 2011). Other studies showed positive associations with women's age, residence, employment and number of living children (Dev et al., 2010).

In Ethiopia, despite the introduction of the legal reforms undertaken over the years, domestic violence including wife battering, intimidation and showing disrespect to the woman spouse are still common to all the regions. There are very few population-based attempts to estimate the level of women's status in terms of disparities in autonomy and power relations across cultural or ethnic groups. Most of our knowledge of these areas is dependent on national level reports borne by the Demographic and Health Surveys of 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015, which normally do not present the statistics for each ethnic and cultural group. Those available studies have focused on women's individual

characteristics, and we have limited studies on household determinants of women's autonomy and power.

This study therefore tries to examine women's status in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), with particular emphasis on autonomy in decision makings and domestic violence among selected households in five zones.

2. The study area

The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), one of the nine states constituting the federal government of Ethiopia, is located in the southern part of the country. Administratively, the region is divided into fourteen zones, one city administration and four special woredas/districts. The latter include Hadiya, Sidama, Gedio, Silte, Gurage, Kambata Tembaro, Gamo goffa, South Omo, Bench Maji, Kafa, Sheka, Dawro, Wolayta and Segen people's zones and Basketo, Yem, Konta, and Halaba special woredas. The state capital of the region is Hawassa, which is run under city administration at the status of zonal administration (BoFED, 2006). The region is multi ethnic, with fifty six nations and nationalities living together. The nations and nationalities have their own language, culture and tradition which give the region an appearance of a mosaic of people and cultures.

According to the last Population and Housing Census of the year 2007, the total population of the region is estimated at about 15.3 million, of which nearly half were female population. A more recent estimate put the population size of the region as 17,359,008 (CSA, 2011). The region's population accounts for 20 percent of the total population of the country, which makes it the third populous region in the country next to Oromia and Amhara federal states (CSA, 2007). The region is one of those with uneven distribution of population with crude density of 110.2 persons per square kilometre.

There are 3,432,160 households in the region with an average household of 4.7 persons per household in rural areas and 4.6 persons per household in the urban areas. The economy of SNNPR is dominated by agriculture. According to the report of the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, 68% of the population depends on agriculture and the remaining 18% and 14% depends on services and industry

respectively. The region grows cereals like teff, wheat, barley, maize, sorghum...etc. Root crops like enset, cassava, sweet potato, are highly produced in the region. Coffee is the main cash crop in the region.

The region is characterized by a large number of children under 15 (about 46) while those in the age group 15-64 and above 64 account for 50 and 3.3 percent respectively. Despite encouraging improvements during the course of time, the lack of good antenatal delivery (about 40%), poor postpartum care, malnutrition, anaemia (16%), high fertility and the like characterizes the region (CSA 2011). Access to and success in education at primary level has shown significant improvement over the years. The EDHS 2011 witnessed the fact that about 64.3 percent had primary education while those who completed secondary or higher education is very low. The Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) at primary level is higher among females than males, which gives a gender disparity index for females to males of 0.96 (CSA 2011).

The present study was conducted in five randomly selected zones and one city administration; namely, Sidama zone, Hadiya, Gamo Gofa, South Omo, Bench Maji, and Hawassa City Administration.

Sidama zone is one of the 13 administrative districts found in SNNPR, with a total area of 7,200 km² divided into ten sub-zones, called '*woredas*' and two administrative towns. According to the recent estimate, the total population of the zone is about 3 million with an average density of 386 persons per km², making it one of the densely populated areas in the region.

The second selected area, Hadiya, is located in the central north part of the region. The total population of Hadiya is 1.5 million and the average household number is more or less similar to that of the region in urban and rural areas. Hadiya's economy is very much dominated by agriculture. South Omo Zone is the third area selected for the present study. It is one of the two pastoral zones and the remotest area in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People Regional State (SNNPRS). It has 8 woredas, six of which are lowlands, inhabited by 16 different ethnic groups/ pastoral communities. The Bench Maji zone, which is one of the 14 zones and 4 special woredas of SNNPR State, is located in the north western part of the regional state. It is made up of 10 woredas and one administrative town, with Mizan Aman as its capital.

3. Data source and methodology

Basically, the study is a cross-sectional survey designed with qualitative and quantitative methods. The sample size for the study was determined by using the formula for a cross-sectional household-based survey. The estimated sample size for each zone was 371 and weighted by 1.5 (Cochrane, 1977), in case of using multistage sampling techniques, to get a size of 557, then a 5 % contingency was added to get the final sample size of 584 households from each zone (leading a total sample size of 3,282 for the region).

The individual households were selected using the multistage sampling technique. The process of sampling for the household level survey started by grouping the 11 zones of SNNPR into three clusters, based on geographical location and economic activities. Such stratification helped reduce sampling error by drawing the appropriate sample size from a homogenous population subset. In the first stage, Hadya, Sidama and Gamo Gofa were selected from the northern and central geographical clusters of the region. South Omo and Bench Maji zones were purposefully selected, which may also represent the southern and western edge/geographical clusters of the region. In the second sampling stage, two woreda from each selected zone were purposefully selected in consultation with the concerned regional offices, giving a total of eight study woredas. At the third stage of sampling, 5-10% Kebeles from the total list of kebeles of each selected woreda (proportionally representing urban and rural kebeles) were considered. Based on the information from CSA, it is assumed that the Kebeles within a district have more or less similar characteristics and size. At the final stage of sampling, the 584 households were randomly selected from each zone using the Kebele roster where the number of selected households (HHs) was determined by the proportionate sampling formula ($n \times n1/N$).

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools including household survey questionnaire and focus group discussion. Following training of field staff and subsequent data collection, the data were analysed by SPSS version 19. Ordinary Least Square regression analysis was used to estimate the effects of selected explanatory variables on the two response variables.

While the level of autonomy can be examined based on different indicators, this study used a set of questions related to decision makings on key household matters. The variable was then measured by the autonomy index calculated and computed from decision making indicators computed “only for the respondents” and joint decision with her husband excluding the “husband’s alone and other decision”. The women who scored “0” out of “6” were valued as those who have “No autonomy,” and those who scored “1-6” were valued as those who have “some autonomy”. Measures of autonomy based on multiple types of decisions, when aggregated, may provide useful insights on household decision-making processes (Malhotra, 2002). Information on IPV was collected by using five sets of questions which focused on women. The nature of the questions call for responses on occurrence/ absence of selected violence-related events (such as beating, insulting, chasing, causing physical assault and slapping) during a reference period of twelve months prior to the survey date.

4. Results

Background characteristics

Table 1 presents the background characteristics of respondents. The age distribution of the respondents shows that a larger proportion of them (59.5%) are in early adulthood (age 20-34) followed by those in the age group of 35-49 (32.5 %). As expected, most respondents are either farmers (34.6%) or housewives (29.4%). The distribution of respondents by educational status reveals that the majority of women respondents are illiterate (40.0%), followed by elementary level (17.4 %). Twelve percent of the respondents are literate, but without formal education, and another 12 percent have attained high school education.

The majority of the respondents (50.9 %) had households of 4-6 members and another significant proportion (32.8%) of them had households of greater than 6 members. Those with relatively smaller size households accounted for 16.4 percent. The average household size for the study population is 5.87. Based on the household ownership of common assets, about 30 % of the households were classified as materially poor, 53.4 percent as medium and the remaining 16.9 percent were categorized as better off.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by selected household characteristics, SNNPR (n= 3282)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Respondent age		
age less than 20	82	2.5
age 20-34	1952	59.5
age 35-49	1067	32.5
age 50-64	126	3.8
age above 64	55	1.7
Employment status		
Pastoralist	327	10.0
Farmer	1134	34.6
Civil servant	323	9.8
Private Organization employee	78	2.4
Private business	316	9.6
Volunteer	7	.2
Contract worker	55	1.7
House wife	966	29.4
Other	22	2.3
Educational status		
Illiterate	1312	40.0
Literate	395	12.0
Primary	572	17.4
Junior Secondary school	310	9.4
Secondary School	382	11.6
Diploma	183	5.6
First Degree	66	2.0
Other	15	1.9
Household size		
0-3 members	538	16.4
4-6 members	1669	50.9
above 6 members	1075	32.8
Wealth index		
Materially Poor	975	29.7
Medium	1752	53.4
Materially better	555	16.9

Source: computed from own survey data

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by reported level of autonomy, SNNPR (n= 3282)

<i>Autonomy Indicators</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Hus</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
Decisions on finance generated by the respondent	13.2	14.7	70.0	.6	98.4
Decisions on finance generated by the husband	5.6	20.2	71.5	.4	97.7
Decisions on family visits	6.8	20.5	70.4	.1	97.8
Decisions on purchasing and selling materials	5.4	15.4	77.1	.1	98.1
Decisions on purchasing and selling household assets during crisis	4.5	17.2	75.3	.3	97.4
Decisions on use and choice of family planning methods	4.9	18.9	55.4	2.4	81.7

Table 2 above indicates that joint decisions on each household matters ranges from 55.4 percent (decisions on use of family planning method) to 77.1 percent (decision on sale and purchase of household materials). Looking at the autonomy index computed at the bottom of the table, it suggests that women are taking an active role in household level decision makings. According to DHS (2011) for the region, women's participation in decision making, particularly pertaining to their own health care, household purchase and family visits was 84.8 percent.

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of the respondents by reported experience of violence during a reference period of 12 months. As it can be seen in Table 3, the most commonly reported form of violence was insult by husbands (47.9%) followed by slapping (24.1%), beating (22.6%), and chasing by husbands (15.2%). The summing up the six indicators for each respondent indicated that about 26 percent of them encountered at least one violence act during the reference period.

Table 3 Percentage distribution of respondents by reported occurrence of violence acts by husbands, SNNPR (n= 3282)

<i>Violence Indicators</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Total</i>
Beaten by husband	22.6	72.3	94.9
Slapped by husband	24.1	67.8	91.9
Insulted by husband	47.9	46.8	94.7
Chased by husband	15.2	75.8	91.0
Faced physical harm or damage	4.9	85.7	90.6
Faced sarcastic remarks	9.0	80.5	89.5
Violence index			
None of the violence acts occurred	42.0		
At least one violence act occurred	26.7		
At least two violence indicators occurred	12.2		
At least three violence indicators occurred	9.5		
At least four violence indicators occurred	5.2		
At least five violence indicators occurred	3.0		
All six violence indicators occurred	1.4		
Total	100		

An attempt was also made to further examine the key predictors of women autonomy and intimate partners' violence in the study area using OLS regression (See tables 4 and 5 respectively). In Table 4, the variable is autonomy index and the regression analysis in Table 5 dependent used IPV as dependent variable. In order to examine the relationship between the two dependent variables, the autonomy index was used as one of the predictors in IPV regression analysis in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of ordinary least square (OLS) regression for selected explanatory variables and women autonomy SNNPR, Ethiopia (n = 3282)

Variables			
	β	SE	Sig.
(Constant)	4.788	.329	.000
TLU	-.004	.002	.026
Household wealth index	.287	.079	.000
Household size	-.166	.069	.017
Respondent's educational status	.044	.030	.142

Radio listening frequency	.093	.037	.012
Respondent's age	.001	.005	.776
Respondent's religion	.056	.040	.165
Sex preference index	-.049	.019	.010

An increase of one unit in the Total Livestock Units (TLU) results in a decrease in the level of autonomy by 0.004 units, suggesting that the two variables are negatively related ($p=0.026$).

The relationship between household size and autonomy level has become significant ($p=0.017$). An increase in household size by one unit results in a decrease of autonomy index by 0.166 units. Evidence from regional and national surveys (DHS 2005 and 2011) indicate that poor households do not usually have information on important household issues including family planning, gender equality, health care, education etc... which in turn keeps them more traditional and conservative. The strongest negative relationship is established between gender (sex) preference index and the dependent variable (autonomy). Table 4 shows that a one unit increase in the gender preference index results in a decline of women autonomy by 0.049 units.

Table 5: Results of ordinary least square (OLS) regression for selected explanatory variables and IPV, SNNPR, Ethiopia (n = 3282)

Variables	B	SE	Sig.
(Constant)	1.586	.196	.000
Household size	.141	.037	.000
Educational status of the respondent	-.075	.016	.000
Radio listening frequency	-.054	.021	.009
Respondent's age	-.002	.003	.545
Respondent's religion	.001	.022	.070
Sex preference index	.067	.010	.000
Households wealth index	-.135	.043	.002
Women autonomy index	-.164	.015	.000

On the other hand, the results in Table 5 above indicate that seven variables predicted the occurrence of violent acts against women in the

study area. They include household size, education, and access to radio, value of children index, wealth index and level of women autonomy.

An increase by one unit in household size brings about 0.141 units increase in the occurrence of violent acts by husbands, suggesting that the two variables are positively related ($p=0.000$). The relationship between women's educational status and the level of violence faced has become strongly significant ($p=.000$), where an increase in educational level by one unit results in a decrease of IPV by 0.075. As shown in Table 5, a one unit increase in access to radio results in a decline of violent acts by 0.054 units. The strongest negative relationship existed between women's autonomy level and the likelihood of occurrence of violence. As women's autonomy increases by one unit, there is a tendency for violence acts to decrease by 0.164 units. Similarly, the household wealth index has established a very strong negative relationship with IPV ($p= 0.002$; $B= -0.135$). Hence, women's education, autonomy and access to media are found to play a significant role in decreasing intimate partner violence against women.

5. Discussion

This study examined two key dimensions of women's status in Southern Ethiopia: autonomy and IPV. The analysis revealed that while joint decision is fairly high, women's independent decision making on key household domains is generally low. This finding is consistent with studies conducted in other developing countries. For instance, a study in 3 South Asian countries (Upul 1 and Nalika, 2009), using nationally representative surveys, revealed that decisions of women's health care were made without their participation in the majority of Nepal (72.7%) and approximately half of Bangladesh (54.3%) and Indian (48.5%) households. In Sri Lanka, decision making for contraceptive use was a collective responsibility in the majority (79.7%).

Significant proportions of women in the region are exposed to violence by their partners ranging from insult to heavy physical injury. The fact that nearly half of the women experienced insult and close to a quarter of them faced beating is indicative of the low status of women in the society. The findings from the qualitative data (e.g. focus group discussants in Hammer and Sheko districts) suggest that gender-based

violence has been very serious and life-threatening, but nowadays the situation has generally improved. Previous large scale studies documented the very high prevalence of IPV in Ethiopia. According to a 15-site study conducted in 10 countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand and Tanzania) the proportion of ever-partnered women who reported ever having experienced physical violence ranged from 15% in a Japanese city to 71% in an Ethiopian province (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2006). Similarly, the lowest prevalence of sexual violence in the past 12 months was reported in Japan and Serbia and Montenegro (1%), while the highest current prevalence (44%) was in rural Ethiopia (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2006).

Studies in Africa have reported that about half of all ever-married women in Zambia, 46% in Uganda, 60% in Tanzanian, 42% in Kenya, and a high of 81% in Nigeria have experienced some form of violence in their lives (Kishor and Johnson 2004). Other studies also documented that Gender-based power inequalities can restrict open communication between partners and ultimately result in the erosion of women's autonomy in decision makings concerning their own and household resources (Dev et al, 2010). A study in Egypt (Howaida et al, 2008) reported a high prevalence of domestic violence (62.2%), that is mostly psychological (74.0%), followed by social (26.8%), physical (22.4%) and sexual violence (19.6%).

Women's status has several repercussions such as the facilitation of access to material resources (food, land, income and other forms of wealth) and social resources (knowledge, power, prestige) within the family and community (Dev et al, 2010); the study further examined the impact of selected household and individual factors on both autonomy and IPV. The regression analysis, using the two outcome variables, showed that nearly similar variables predict the likelihood of occurrences of both low autonomy and IPV. In both regression analyses, four common variables appear to influence both dependent variables though with varying degrees of strength. These variables are: wealth index, respondents' access to radio, value of children/sex preference index and household size. On the other hand, TLU and education have predicted only autonomy and IPV respectively. The relationship between

autonomy, IPV and household wealth is complex. In some cases, women in wealthier households have more resources to control and have greater autonomy, and hence there is a lesser occurrence of IPV. In other cases, women in wealthier households are more isolated and have lower physical mobility (Rahman and Rao, 2004; Sathar and Kazi, 2000), which symbolizes the fact that their families are of a higher social class and can afford seclusion for their female members. In this study, the wealth index is found to influence autonomy positively, whereas it showed a strong negative association with IPV, i.e. a better socioeconomic status provides women better opportunity to participate in decision making and may lead to reduced occurrence of IPV.

The analysis showed that there is a reverse relationship between autonomy and livestock ownership, which is commonly viewed as wealth status in the context of the study region. Among the possible reasons for this could be male supremacy, which results from the ownership of a large number of livestock and high social status gained by men in the community, which in turn can be reflected at home by suppressing women's right in decision making. In fact, in most rural areas of SNNPR, the richer farmers are the ones who are usually in a polygamous marital union. Further, the wealthier a person is, the more social autonomy he can exercise in the community, and hence, the tendency to replicate the same behaviour at household level is more likely.

Household size predicted autonomy and IPV in a different direction (negatively and positively, respectively), but with an expected pattern. The inverse relationship between household size and the level of autonomy is also a reflection of the low position of women in a traditional agrarian society where the population experiences high natural fertility. Evidence from regional and national surveys (DHS 2005 and 2011) indicated that poor households do not usually have information on important household issues including family planning, gender equality, health care, education etc... which, in turn, keeps them more traditional and conservative. In a study by Rammohan and Johar (2009), larger household size is negatively associated with autonomy (2009), where smaller households may enable or require women to participate more fully in the work force. Contrary to this finding, studies conducted in three Asian countries reported that women's participation in decision

making significantly increased with number of children. Upul and Nalika, 2009).

Strong associations were found between the gender (sex) preference index and the two dependent variables. A more positive attitude towards and preference for boys eventually gives an upper hand to men in decision making, while granting less autonomy to women. The prevailing preference for a son may be a sign of women's poor perception on the role of daughters and the way they envision their daughters' future in terms of returns for their education.

While women's education was not significantly associated with autonomy, it has appeared to have very a strong inverse association with IPV mainly due to the fact that education enhances women's communication skills and awareness on issues associated with the household and her own wellbeing. Studies conducted in low-income countries by Morales and Reichenheim (2002) and Koenig et al. (2003) found that women who have low educational attainment were more likely to experience violence. Other studies have found that women's educational attainment and those with a high status as measured by education, degree of autonomy or control over resources, are more protected from violence risks (Jewkes et al., 2002; Jejeebhoy, 1997).

The possible link between women's autonomy and domestic violence has also received considerable attention, with several studies revealing that increased status is associated with significantly lower rates of domestic violence (Mikael et al, 2006; Jejeebhoy and Cook, 1997; Schuler et al, 1996). Other studies, however, have shown that increased women's empowerment may actually exacerbate the risk of violence, at least in the short run (Koenig, 2003; Hindin and Adair, 2002).

Given that a large proportion of the sampled women were less educated and unemployed, which might have further exacerbated the women's low status reported above, it is important to mention the legal and policy framework on empowering women in the region. There seems to be a huge gap between what is stated in the Federal Constitution (Article 35 (3)) and the actual reality with regards to empowering women through employment opportunities. Several laws have been issued to empower women in the economic field and to make sure that they enjoy economic rights that are equal to men's. For

instance, the Federal Civil Servants Proclamation (No. 515/2007: Article 13 (3)) attempts to make sure that women are treated with equality and affirmative measures in the public sector by authorizing preferences to be given to female candidates having equal or close scores to that of other candidates. However, such efforts provide little help to the huge uneducated women in rural and urban areas. Similarly, despite the fact that improvements in girls' education at all levels is recorded, there is still a huge gap in addressing rural women.

There is also another policy framework called Micro and Small Enterprise Development Strategy (1997) which makes specific reference to the advancement of women identifying women as a target group for relevant support measures (Micro and Small Enterprises Development Strategy, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1997). The framework was meant to avail funding to rural and urban women and increase their employment opportunities. Despite some efforts, the implementation of such a strategy is commonly challenged by the low educational status and poor implementation capacities at local level.

With regards to the high IPV in the study population, under the Criminal Code, domestic violence against women is prohibited as violence against a marriage partner or cohabitant. Domestic violence is the commonest of all violence against women and its effect could go beyond women to children, the family and even the community. As the widely practiced violation of women's rights, domestic violence deserves a detailed and broad coverage of protection. However, there is only a single Article directly dealing with it. To this end, Article 564 of the Code punishes violence by a person who, by doing violence to a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union, causes grave or common injury to his / her physical or mental health. However, research shows that these rights are not fully implemented for various reasons, ranging from lack of awareness to reluctance of courts to apply the provisions in favour of women (Wondwossen, 2007).

Focus group discussions and key informants in almost all the districts revealed that there are also some administrative challenges in the effective implementation of the above mentioned policies and strategies. The constraints mentioned can be summed up as follows: lack of commitment (human resources issue), budget and organizations.

According to the key informants in the SNNPR Bureau of Women, Youth and Children, lack of commitment associated with frequent change of leaders is mentioned as one of the serious issues hampering the efficient functioning of the sector. There is no ear-marked budget meant for the various activities of gender issues although in many of the sector offices there are gender focal persons assigned. The other key problem mentioned by key informants was organizational structure. According to them, the higher executive or decision maker of the Bureau of Women, Youth and Children (WYC) is politically assigned, and most of the times professionals encounter difficulties to convince the leader as to how activities should be conducted.

6. Conclusion and policy implications

The present study uncovers the low status of women in the region where a larger proportion of women still do not have an equal level of autonomy in making independent decisions. More than 50% of the respondents reported the incidence of one or another form of violence during the reference period. Given the low level of women's education and poor access to the media, both of which are found to affect women's status, the present study suggests creating a forum such as community conversation where women could come together to share ideas and experiences. This, in turn, will help rural women exercise decision-making at household level. Local authorities should prompt the community and religious leaders to fight discriminatory, unequal treatments and human rights violations inflicted on women and children by teaching the community. In order to fully implement the policies and legal frameworks that ensure women's equal participation, continuous gender trainings should be given to the executive bodies until more commitment is developed towards a proper implementation of policies. Capacity building should be taken as an integral part of sector activities in order to implement gender policy and legal frameworks effectively and efficiently. In order to discharge the planned activities concerning gender, there should be an ear-marked budget allocated at all levels of the administrative units. This will increase the commitment of the concerned bodies and will create a proper ground for accountability and gender audit.

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to SNNPR Bureau of Women, Youth and Children Affairs, Ethiopia, for providing financial support for the project through the Hawassa University. Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation also go to our data collection supervisors.