

Women's Empowerment Across the Life Cycle and Generations: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

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Summary. — Does female empowerment evolve over the life cycle, and has it changed across generations? We use data from the Demographic and Health Surveys covering a sample of about 191,000 adult women to evaluate the age, period and cohort effects regarding individual attitudes to marital violence. Pseudo-panel data are constructed from repeated cross-sections from five African countries in the 2000s. The estimates show that, over the life cycle, women tend to think that marital violence is less and less justifiable, and that younger cohorts are less likely than older cohorts to view marital violence as justifiable, even controlling for education.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, female empowerment in developing countries has attracted growing interest from policy-makers and researchers. This empowerment has become a policy goal *per se* and in acknowledgment of the long-run benefits it confers on women and their families. Empowerment can be viewed as a dynamic process that increases women's ability to make choices about their lives and environment (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005), or as the ability to access health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation (Duflo, 2011). It is a multidimensional concept which is not directly observable. A recent body of empirical literature has however made some attempts at measurement. Various approaches have been considered, such as participation in household decision-making, gender-relative status or control over money use (Allendorf, 2007; Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Ashraf, Karlan, & Yin, 2010; Beegle, Frankenberg, & Thomas, 2001; Garikipati, 2008). The empowerment of women and reduced gender inequality have been shown to increase the use of prenatal and delivery care services (Beegle *et al.*, 2001), influence investment in children and other family members (Reggio, 2011), increase female labor-force participation (Hendy & Sofer, 2009), and improve both productivity and efficiency (Alkire, Meinzen-Dick, Peterman, Quisumbing, Seymour, & Vaz, 2013).

What are the main driving forces behind empowerment? Does female empowerment evolve over the life cycle and has it changed across generations? It is commonly believed that young women now are more emancipated than their older counterparts. Does the fact that younger women are now more empowered mean that empowerment falls over the life cycle (i.e., the aging effect is negative)? This is probably not the case, especially if we view empowerment as a stock that is likely accumulated over time. An alternative reading is that young women being more empowered means that women from recent generations are more empowered than their counterparts from older generations (i.e., a cohort effect), with one explanation being changes in educational attainment. Are women empowering as they age or are women from recent generations starting with a greater empowerment stock than their older counterparts? The use of panel or pseudo panel data is required to disentangle the life-cycle and cohort effects (Deaton, 1985). We here propose the use of pseudo-panel data

to estimate the respective roles of age, period and cohort on female empowerment.

One important dimension of female empowerment is the refusal of domestic or marital violence. Domestic violence against women has received growing attention worldwide, and is considered not only as a violation of fundamental rights but also as a burden leading to considerable health and demographic damage (e.g., Sobkoviak, Yount, & Halim, 2012). Considerable political effort has been mobilized against this form of violence. Violence against women can be analyzed by focusing on whether a woman has been a victim of violence, or alternatively whether women consider marital violence to be acceptable within their households, or against women in society in general. The knowledge of women's attitudes to wife-beating is fundamental for seeing how women perceive the status of their gender in society. Hindin (2003) notes that women's attitudes can serve as a marker for the social acceptability of wife-beating. Using a perception measure of whether marital violence can be justified provides insights into women's views of their place in society.

This paper contributes to the literatures on the determinants of women's empowerment and views on marital violence by providing new information about changes over the life cycle and differences across generations using data from a sample of Sub-Saharan African countries. Previous work on the determinants of female empowerment has considered the role of credit access (Ashraf *et al.*, 2010; Garikipati, 2008), labor-force status and, in particular, working outside the husband's farm (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009), education (Mahmud, Shah, & Becker, 2012), and television watching (Mahmud *et al.*, 2012). Cross-cultural research on women's views regarding domestic violence against women is still limited, however.

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The Demographic and Health Surveys collected in most developing countries, which include a wide range of information about health outcomes, have since the very late 1990s contained additional questions on marital violence, allowing for cross-country comparisons, and have been analyzed in a number of existing pieces of research (Hindin, 2003; Lawoko, 2006; Lawoko, 2008; Li & Yount, 2009; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Rani, Bonu, & Diop-Sidibe, 2004; Yount, 2005; Yount & Carrera, 2006). We depart from this existing literature by using a pseudo-panel data model to analyze the respective roles of aging and cohort.

Most of the work on the effect of age on female empowerment or views on marital violence has relied on cross-section data, and has produced contrasting results. In terms of female empowerment, Anderson and Eswaran (2009) conclude to a zero or negative effect of age on indicators of female autonomy, while Mahmud *et al.* (2012) found a significant effect for two out of five empowerment indicators, but with effects in opposite directions. In terms of the acceptance of marital violence, Hindin (2003) revealed a strong positive association between acceptance and age in data from the 1999 Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey. However, it is difficult to identify age effects cleanly in cross-section data. In cross-sections, any estimated age differences may reflect actual age, or equally the effect of the characteristics of different birth cohorts (see e.g., Glenn, 2005).

We here use pseudo-panel data to analyze attitudes to marital violence over cohorts based on a representative sample of about 191,000 women aged between 15 and 49. We use three successive cross-sections of data from the Demographic and Health Surveys in five Sub-Saharan African countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). In each survey wave, the sample is random and representative. In repeated cross-section data, households and individuals are not tracked over time, but a pseudo-panel data can be constructed so as to follow groups of people who belong to the same birth cohorts, defined at the country-level.

We consider a number of approaches to the measurement of the relative roles of age, period, and cohort (APC) on marital-violence attitudes. We first look at these pairwise, before setting out a full APC decomposition. Our age-period-cohort analysis aims to isolate the effects of each component on some outcome of interest net of the influence of the other two (Yang & Land, 2008). The period or wave effects in our analysis show the evolution in attitudes over the 2000s, as we use survey data collected at three points in time: the early 2000s, the mid-2000s and the late 2000s. The results suggest that, when taken pairwise, all three components help explain the percentage of women considering marital violence as not justified under any circumstances. We have three main findings. First, in a given cohort, women are more empowered as they age. Second, women in the early 2000s are more likely to think marital violence justified than those in the mid-2000s, and especially those in the late 2000s, suggesting strong period effects. Third, women in more recent cohorts are less likely to accept violence than women born in the 1950s. In addition, the full age-period-cohort decomposition suggests that some of these findings were due to confounding factors, as cohort effects are no longer statistically significant, while the age and period effects continue to play an important role in explaining female empowerment.

We explore the mechanisms behind the age effects. First, these could reflect female labor-force participation rising with age (as compared to a young woman of 15). Labor-force participation may empower women in their households and communities, and enable them to communicate more with their peers, including with respect to gender roles and status. When we control for labor-force status, we find that working women

are far more likely than others to refuse marital violence, and that the age effects become insignificant. A second pathway could work via household composition, whereby younger women are more likely to still live with their parents. As such, they are more influenced by older generations who are less critical of violence, and in addition they may not perceive what wife-beating means, in the sense that they are not in a couple and not personally confronted with it. We thus control for whether the woman is living in a nuclear-type family in which she is the household head or the spouse of the household head. Our finding suggests that living in a nuclear family increases female empowerment, and somewhat attenuates the age effect. Last, age effects can reflect parenthood: older women are more likely to have had children, including sons, which might empower them in a patrilocal context. Controlling for the number of sons in the estimation as well as the number of children does not change the strong effect of aging on empowerment.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 sets out the conceptualization of empowerment. Section 3 presents the pseudo-panel approach and Section 4 the data and variables. Section 5 then presents the statistical methods and comments on the empirical results. Some robustness checks and possible mechanisms behind the age and period effects are explored in Section 6. Last, Section 7 concludes.

2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EMPOWERMENT

Following Kabeer (1999), empowerment refers to a dynamic process through which individuals acquire the ability to make choices. More precisely, empowerment can be considered as the process of change by which individuals enhance their freedom to act and to achieve what they consider valuable, whereas they were denied this capacity beforehand. The acquired capacity is called agency. As such, empowerment can be defined as an increase in agency (Trommlerova, Klasen, & Lessmann, 2015). Agency represents individuals' capacity to define their own life-choices and aspirations, and to act accordingly, even if these life-choices and related actions are in contradiction with their peers (spouse, family or community).

Applying these concepts of empowerment and agency to women's status, female agency can refer to what occurs at the end of the empowerment process. Women's empowerment leads to greater agency. Salem, Cheong, VanderEnde, and Yount (2014) provide insights into the conceptualization of female agency by stating that this encompasses three domains: their influence in family decisions, their freedom of movement in public spaces, and their expressions of views favoring more equitable gender roles. These three domains are complementary. We can argue that a woman is not observed to be empowered if she does not take part in household decisions, if she is not free of movement, and/or if she shares views favoring male domination. The first two domains are linked to their bargaining power within the household or couple, while the last is related to values and attitudes, and can be seen as going beyond what a woman experiences in her own household, and is not restricted to married women.

Each of these three domains has specific indicators. Women's influence in intra-household decision-making refers to whether women themselves are involved in decisions about their own health care, large or small household purchases, visits to family or relatives, giving assistance to family members, and children's schooling (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Ashraf *et al.*, 2010). Freedom of movement refers to the relationship within the couple, and especially the relative control of the husband over his wife, and involves questions regarding whether their husband tries to limit his wife's contact with

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