



# Generosity and sharing among villagers: Do women give more?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores generosity among anonymous villagers and sharing within families using a dictator game field experiment that was carried out in rural villages in Ethiopia. We find that generosity among anonymous villagers is very low compared with the findings in the dictator game literature. On average, the dictators in our sample allocate only 6% of their endowments to anonymous persons in the village, and 73% of the dictators keep all of their endowments to themselves when paired with anonymous persons. However, we found very high levels of sharing between husband and wife. In terms of gender differences, we find that women are not more generous towards anonymous persons, nor are they more likely to share within their families. In fact, there is some evidence, albeit weak, showing that women allocate less to anonymous persons than do men. Additionally, there is strong evidence that women are less likely to share their resources with their spouse than are men.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the dictator game was introduced by [Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler \(1986\)](#), a number of game experiments have been conducted with real monetary payments as well as tokens to explore people's altruism and generosity. What is consistently found across studies and across different societies is a significant deviation from the prediction of the canonical model of the self-interested 'man' ([Camerer, 2003](#); [Henrich et al., 2001](#)). Individuals do share with other people without any reciprocal expectations. [Camerer \(2003\)](#) found that more than 60% of dictators give positive amounts of money. A recent meta-analysis of dictator game experiments based on data from more than 130 studies reported that on average, dictators shared 28% of their endowments ([Engel, 2011](#)).

One of the concerns about earlier experimental studies in economics, including dictator game experiments, is the extent to which the results can be generalized. The typical subjects of most experiments have been university students from developed countries who may not represent other segments of society in the developed world or their counterparts in developing countries. Available evidence suggests that subjects from western educated and developed societies differ in many important behavioral dimensions (see [Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010b](#) for discussion), limiting the generalizability of lab experiment results to the larger society. Some recent studies have attempted to fill this research gap by conducting experiments

with non-student subjects and subjects from developing countries (see [Cardenas and Carpenter, 2008](#) for review). A cross-country study by Henrich and colleagues based on experiments in 15 small-scale societies show that although the canonical model of self-interested individuals was not supported by the results from any of the societies in the sample, there were large variations across societies in the observed behaviors ([Henrich et al., 2001, 2010a, 2006](#)). More diversified data from field experiments are needed to better understand the patterns of divergence from the game theoretic expectations. In this regard, there is a dearth of experimental evidence from Africa.

Results from various dictator game experiments suggest that women are more altruistic than men and value generosity and equality of pay-offs ([Andreoni and Vesterlund, 2001](#); [Dufwenberg and Muren, 2006](#); [Eckel and Grossman, 1996, 1998](#)). Based on a double-blind dictator game experiment at three universities in the US, [Eckel and Grossman \(1998\)](#) conclude that women are more generous than men and donate twice as much as men to their anonymous partners. [Eckel and Grossman \(1998, 2008\)](#) argue that the conflicting results that were reported for gendered difference in generosity and cooperation from various public goods and ultimatum games may have been caused by factors that could have confounded basic gender differences. For example, if women are more risk averse, then they may be more generous in the ultimatum game and less generous in the public goods game. The authors claim that the double-blind dictator game offers 'a pure test of basic male/female differences in selfishness' because it eliminates strategic risk, subject/subject interactions and subject/experimenter interactions ([Eckel and Grossman, 1998, 2008](#)). However, gender differences may not be universal across cultures. Evidence from other behavioral experiments highlights the

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relevance of culture for gendered differences. For example, a study of Masai women and men in Tanzania (a patriarchal society) and Khasi women and men in India (a matrilineal society) revealed that in identical experiments, the men were more competitive in the Masai society and the women were more competitive in the Khasi society. This evidence indicates that such gender differences in preferences are affected by socialization and culture and may not be universal. This paper seeks to test whether sharing behavior among poor villagers in a patriarchal African society shows the same pattern as that reported in most of the dictator game literature, particularly focusing on gender-based differences in generosity.

The gender-based difference in generosity and sharing behavior is explored at two levels using a dictator game field experiment that was carried out in rural villages in Ethiopia. Our sample contains 362 men and 362 women from 17 communities in Southern Ethiopia. We explore (the standard) sharing behavior among anonymous villagers using a pairing procedure that makes it impossible for either the dictators or the recipients to identify their partners. In addition, our sample selection procedure provided us opportunity to explore sharing behavior within households. The initial sample selection was at household level, from which we draw 362 married couples as players. We expect that sharing within the household would be higher than sharing among anonymous individuals since resources are shared within households, although the level of resource pooling would be different across households for various reasons. Previous empirical evidences on household spending behavior showed that income and assets controlled by women are associated with better household food consumption than similar endowments controlled by men (Doss, 2006; Hoddinott & Haddad, 1995; Schady & Rosero, 2008). However, it is not clear whether this is due to changes in priority of spending from the household budget or if women share more of their resources with their family than men do. This paper tests whether women share more than men with their spouse if they are able to hide their endowment. For sharing between husbands and wives, the game design allows the dictator anonymity during the experiment so that the recipient does not know whether he/she is paired with a spouse or anonymous person. To the best of our knowledge, this combined within-household and within-village sharing with a focus on gender differences in allocation is a novel contribution of our study that provides new insights on intra-family and intra-village sharing.

We find that generosity among anonymous individuals is very low compared with the findings in the dictator game literature. On average, the dictators in our sample allocate only 6% of their endowments to anonymous persons in the village. Three-fourths of the dictators keep all of the pie to themselves when paired with anonymous persons. In terms of gender differences, we find that women are not more generous than men towards anonymous villagers. In fact, there is weak evidence that shows smaller allocations by women to anonymous villagers. We find that there is a high level of sharing between married couples. More than 80% of the players transfer part of their endowments to their spouses, with the majority allocating half of their endowments. However, women allocate significantly less than men to their spouses.

## 2. Sample and experimental design

### 2.1. Sample selection

This study is based on a dictator game played in the field with a sample of 362 households in 17 communities in Southern Ethiopia in 2012. These communities contain an average of 500 farm households under a local administrative structure called a 'kebele'. The sample households within a kebele were randomly selected from a list of residents provided by village administrators. These households were sampled for a household survey in 2007 and resurveyed in 2012. The

participants in this study are monogamous married couples<sup>1</sup> resulting in 362 men and 362 women participants in the experiment. The experiments were introduced after couples had participated in separate survey interviews that took place immediately before the experiment. The money received in the experiments could therefore be regarded as earned rather than as windfall money.

### 2.2. Background on the study area

The study areas are selected from three districts in the Oromia region (Sashemene, Arsi Negelle and Wondo Oromia) and two districts from Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) region (Wondo Genet and Wollaita). The Oromo ethnic group dominates in the three Oromia districts (92–97%), the Wollaita ethnic group dominates in Wollaita (97%) and the Sidama ethnic group dominates in Wondo Genet (60%). People from Oromo ethnic group constitute a significant minority in Wondo Genet district (23%), but in other districts the small minorities are composed of diverse ethnic groups (see Appendix A -2 for detail). The households in these communities are mainly farming households but there is substantial variation in their production systems ranging from cash crop-oriented households to subsistence-oriented ones and from cereal crop producers to perennial crop producers. There is no insurance and little formal social protection for rural households in these areas. Villagers support each other during idiosyncratic shocks such as the loss of household members, loss of cattle or harvest failure through local institutions such as Iddir- (an association explicitly formed to provide mutual financial and social support upon loss of family member, and sometimes upon loss of livestock) and Equib (rotating saving association). There is also a strong culture of mutual support among kin, friends and neighbors in times of need (see Bevan & Pankhurst, 1996).

### 2.3. Experimental design

In each village, an appropriate site was identified for the experiment (such as an office at the health station or an agricultural extension office). All households in the village played the game within one day to minimize communication and information leakage. Households were informed of the experiment date, place and time at the conclusion of the household survey. The household heads and their respective spouses were asked to come to the experiment site together. Three separate places (rooms or shades) were prepared at the experiment site to be used during the game. The place where the dictator made the allocation decision was always a secluded room. The other places were prepared for those players identified as recipients and for the couples who had not yet been identified as a recipient or dictator. These two groups were kept separate using all available means. When rooms were available, these two groups were put into separate rooms. If there were no other rooms, participants were kept on opposite sides of the compound in which the experiment took place. All of the public spaces used for experiments had fenced compounds, but it was not always possible to find more than one room at the experiment sites.

Because the majority of the respondents are illiterate, the experimenter explained the game and completed the form with their allocation decisions. In each village, the experiment was conducted by bilingual enumerators who spoke the local language. None of the enumerators was personally known to the respondents, and thus, we

<sup>1</sup> The sample size for the household survey was approximately 600. We administered the experiment to all of the 2012 households, but 15% of these households were polygamous, 12% were female headed (typically widowed) and the remainder did not have their spouses with them at the time of the survey for different reasons (e.g., because of travel, serious illness or marital separation); in these cases, the game was played with another member. **For this study, we use only data from monogamous households where both the husband and the wife were present.**

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