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GENDER
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LAB



STEP 1: PROVIDE RESOURCES

STEP 2: ???

STEP 3: WOMEN ARE EMPOWERED!

Defining Agency and its dimensions



The ability to define one's goals and act on them (Kabeer 1999)

Requires understanding:

- (1) Goal-setting
- (2) Perceived control and ability (“sense of agency”)
- (3) Acting on goals

1. Goal-setting

Individuals need to define goals that are in line with their values

To assess whether observed actions correspond to an exercise of agency:

- A. Do individuals reflect on and develop well-defined goals?
- B. Do these goals stem from individual's own values and preferences?

A. Developing Goals:

- Structured questionnaires/scales in industrial and organizational psychology (Locke and Latham 1984); more recent shorter adaptations: “I regularly set goals in (domain)”; “The goals I set are specific to what I want to accomplish” (Ranked 1-5 from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”).
- Surveys in SSA: simple questions on what the respondent's goals are in a certain domain (post-coded based on how specific and detailed responses are – e.g., Frese et al. 2007)
- More recent addition: questions on goals regarding overall decisionmaking role or involvement within a particular domain

1. Goal-setting

B. Motivational Autonomy:

Main measure is Relative Autonomy Index (Ryan and Deci, 2000)

To what extent is underlying motivation:

- external (*I will get in trouble with someone if I act differently*)
- introjected (*so others don't think poorly of me*)
or
- identified (*I personally think it is the right thing to do*)

More recently adapted as anchoring vignettes

2. Sense of Agency

Individuals need to perceive a sense of control and ability

Measurement of “sense of agency” (SoA) has been the topic of substantial research across disciplines

Social Sciences:

Locus of Control

- a “means-end” relationship – beliefs about how outcomes are contingent upon actions (e.g., **Rotter I-E Scale**)

Self-efficacy

- an “agent-means” relationship – competency beliefs about whether one can produce the relevant actions (e.g. **Condom Use Self-Efficacy Scale**)

2. Sense of Agency

Attempts to measure directly:

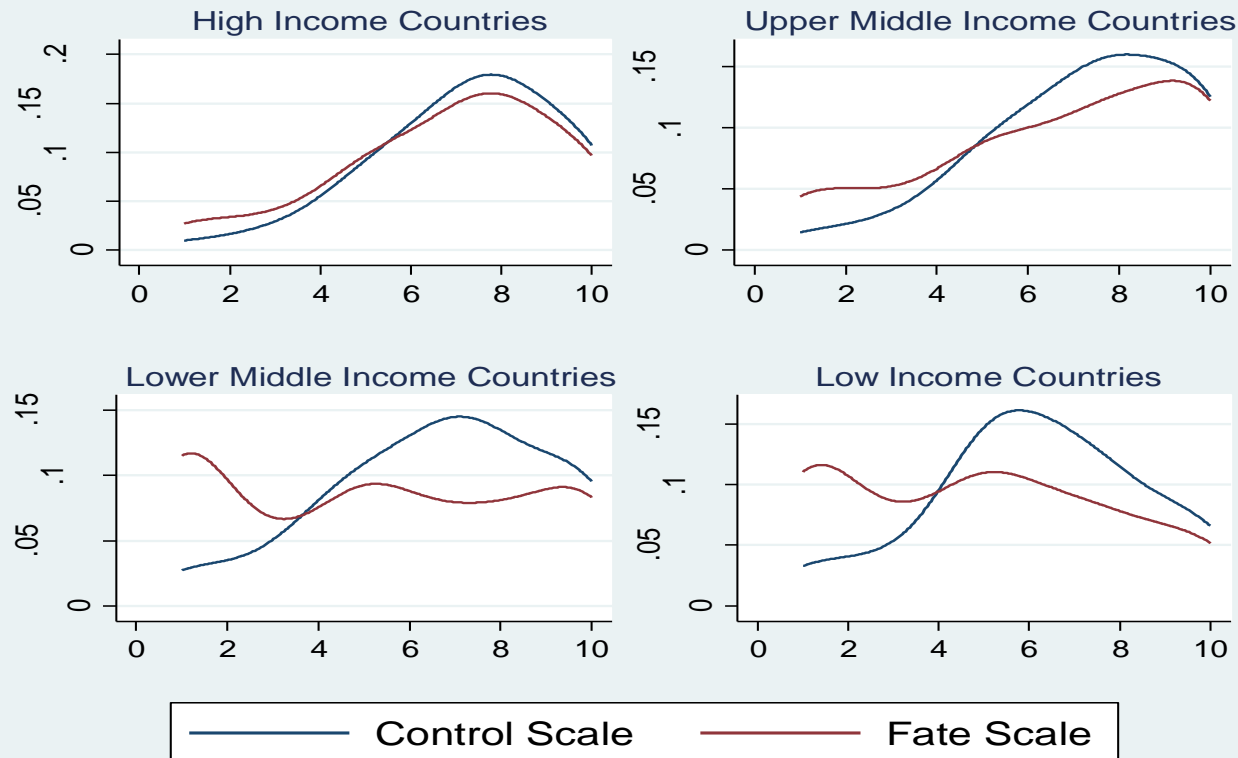
Included in World Values Survey (WVS) since 1981, and increasingly used in household surveys in development settings

- **Control Scale:** Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. ***Please use this scale where 1 means “no choice at all” and 10 means “a great deal of choice” to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.***
- **Fate Scale:** Some people believe that individuals can decide their own destiny, while others think that it is impossible to escape a predetermined fate. ***Using the following scale where 1 means “everything in life is determined by fate” and 10 means “people shape their fate themselves”, please indicate which comes closest to your view.***

2. Sense of Agency

Comparison between scales

Difference b/w Control and Fate Scales by Income Group



1=No Control/Fate determines Everything <-> 10=Full Control/People shape their fate

3. Acting on Goals

Individuals need to act on goals

Within the household, typically been measured in surveys through questions on **decisionmaking roles**

- US literature: Started with Blood and Wolfe's (1960) Decision Power Index: respondent is asked to indicate "who has the final say" in respect to family decisions
- Not substantially changed over time, and use increasing in developing country surveys (Demographic and Health Surveys)

Two main drawbacks of standard decisionmaking questions:

- They miss the process (Peterman et al. 2015)
 - The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index innovates on this
- Ambiguity in phrasing and response options
 - Problematic if there is systematic bias related to outcomes of interest

3. Acting on Goals

Disagreement over decisionmaking

- DHS started asking both husbands and wives about who makes decisions in the household
- Annan et al. (2019): analysis of 71,274 couples across 23 Sub-Saharan African countries
- Well-being outcomes are often best when spouses agree that they jointly make decisions or that the wife is the main decision-maker
 - Women's health (anemia and being underweight)
 - Reproductive health (ever used prenatal help, number of antenatal care visits, needs for family planning are met)
- But 47.5 percent of couples disagree on who makes decisions (matches estimates from southern Asia)

3. Acting on Goals

Disagreement in Decisionmaking

- This disagreement has a direction and appears to capture a different facet of power compared to common measures of women's agency

Share of couples' responses (averaged across countries)

Who usually makes decisions about making major household purchases?		Wife's response:		
		Husband	Joint	Wife
Husband's response:	Wife	4.5%	5.1%	1.6%
	Joint	13.6%	26.4%	5.0%
	Husband	24.5%	15.8%	3.4%

3. Acting on Goals

Taking Power

- Women taking power is associated with benefits
 - Childrens' outcomes (girls' stunting, wasting and vaccination)
 - Norm-defying outcomes (women terminating a pregnancy and reporting modern contraception)
- But also higher emotional violence
- Active field (Ambler et al. 2020 in Nepal, Donald et al. forthcoming in Philippines...)
 - What at first glance is “measurement discrepancy” can shed new light on our understanding of women's agency

Where are we headed?

Future Research

- (1) Goal-setting
- (2) Perceived control and ability (“sense of agency”)
- (3) Acting on goals

New initiative on Measures for Advancing Gender Equality:

- Design and test new ideas through survey experiments to measure specific agency constructs
- Analyze the three dimensions together, across contexts, to uncover relationships and prioritize survey questions
- Broaden the scope of measures to include other age groups
- Systematically adapt measures to local contexts

Where are we headed?

Good measurement can help us understand how households actually work

- This advances theory
- And allows us to design more effective interventions
 - Emerging evidence that programs targeting goal-setting improve outcomes (e.g., Aguinaga et al. 2019, Shah et al. forthcoming)
 - Integration of self-efficacy as channel for technology adoption (e.g., Vasilaky et al. 2018)
 - Interventions targeting intra-household decisionmaking (e.g., Ambler et al. 2018, Lecoutere and Campenhout 2018, Donald et al. forthcoming)

That's all Folks



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