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**The contested relationship between paid work and women's empowerment: empirical analysis from Bangladesh**

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## **Abstract**

*The debate about the empowerment potential of women's access to labour market opportunities is a long-standing one but it has taken on fresh lease of life with the increased feminization of paid work in the context of economic liberalization. Contradictory viewpoints reflect differences in how empowerment itself is understood as well as variations in the cultural meanings and social acceptability of different kinds of paid work. Research on this issue in the Bangladesh context has not been able to address these questions because it tends to use very restricted definitions of work and narrow conceptualizations of empowerment. This paper uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative data from Bangladesh to explore this debate, distinguishing between different categories of work and using measures of women's empowerment which have been explicitly designed to capture the specificities of local patriarchal constraints.*

## **Introduction**

The debate about the relationship between women's access to paid work and their position within family and society is a long-standing one (see review of this literature in Kabeer, 2008). Liberal and Marxist researchers, including feminists of both persuasions, have argued that paid work contributes to women's empowerment, increasing the perceived value of their productive contributions, strengthening their bargaining power within the family and enhancing their position in the wider community. These views have been given a fresh lease of life within the international development community with the increasing participation of women in the labour force that has accompanied globalization and the concomitant interest in its impact on their 'economic empowerment'. Corporations, donors and NGOs are now focused on improving women's access to paid work as the fundamental driver for achieving such empowerment.

There are also more negative assessments. These point to the survival imperatives that drive many women to seek work, their confinement to a restricted range of paid activities, the harsh conditions which characterise much of this work and their continued responsibility for unpaid household labour, leading to longer working days for women than men.

These conflicting views appear to reflect a variety of factors, including differences in the conceptualisation of empowerment; in the contexts in which the analysis is carried out; in the kinds of paid work available in these contexts and in the cultural meanings attached to them. In this paper, we set out to explore the empowerment potential of women's access to the labour market in the specific context of Bangladesh, a country in which the restriction of market opportunities for women and their resulting dependence on male provision across their life-course has long been seen as a foundational aspect of their subordinate status within society.

## **Continuity and change in patriarchal relations in Bangladesh**

The gender and development literature on Bangladesh in the years following its independence in 1971 sketched out a broad-brush picture of patriarchal structures in the society at the time (Cain et al., 1979; McCarthy and Feldman, 1984; Adnan, 1993). It pointed out that the widespread practice of patrilineal inheritance, the transmission of descent and property through the male line, left women genealogically irrelevant and effectively propertyless. Hierarchical structures within the family meant that authority was vested in its senior male member who made key decisions on behalf of the rest of the family. *Purdah* norms restricted women's mobility in the public domain, confining them to reproductive responsibilities along with those forms of productive work that could be carried out in and around the home.

Women tended to marry outside their own kinship systems and generally outside their natal villages. They were thus cut off from the support of, and ability to contribute to, their natal family after marriage, lowering the value of daughters to parents. The emergence of the practice of dowry, sometime in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shifted the net flow of wealth at marriage from the bride's family, as had previously been the case, to that of the groom, further intensifying the perception of daughters as economic liabilities. Not surprisingly, Bangladesh was characterised by a culture of strong son preference and by the high levels of fertility necessary to assure the survival of a minimum number of sons.

In their study of rural Bangladesh carried out in the late 1970s, Cain *et al.* (1979) coined the concept of 'patriarchal risk' to capture women's lifelong dependence on men and the precipitous decline in their material condition and social status which frequently accompanied the loss of the male breadwinner/guardian through widowhood, divorce or desertion. One obvious way for women to have secured themselves against such risk would have been through paid work so that they had some resources of their own to fall back on should such risk materialize. However, in the face of a highly gender-stratified labour market, this did not appear to be a realistic option. A small minority of educated urban women benefited from government quotas in socially acceptable public sector employment, but these opportunities were extremely limited. The only other group of women who left the shelter of their homes to seek paid work in the public domain came from households who could not afford to observe *purdah* norms. They were found in various forms of poorly-paid, casual daily wage labour.

Given the apparent non-negotiability of these restrictions on paid employment as a means for mitigating women's economic dependence, Cain *et al.* (1979) offered a gloomy prognosis for women's position in Bangladesh society: 'The systemic nature of patriarchy suggests that solutions to the problem of women's vulnerability and lack of income-earning opportunities will not be easily reached' (p. 434)

As it happens, a number of positive changes have taken place since that time. Growth rates increased from annual rates of 3% in the 1970s to 5-6% in recent years along with gradual but steady declines in poverty (Osmani et al, 2003). A determined push on modern family planning services accelerated the decline in fertility rates that had begun more gradually sometime in the 1960s (Kabeer, 2001) while active state and NGO support for girls' education helped to reverse the gender gap at primary and secondary levels (World Bank 2008). Female labour force participation rates rose - gradually but steadily - from the 4% recorded in the 1974 Bangladesh Census (Mahmud and Mahmud, 1991) to 36% according to the 2010 Labour Force Survey (Gov. of Bangladesh, 2011). While some of this rise clearly represented the distress sale of labour - poorer women continue to report higher rates of labour force participation - it also reflected the expansion of economic opportunities for women from various sources. These included the emergence of community-based provision of social services as respectable employment options for women with some education; the massive expansion of NGO-led microfinance services to promote female entrepreneurship; and the growth of a largely female-intensive export-oriented garment industry (World Bank, 2008).

At the same time, patriarchal constraints have not disappeared. While the gender gap in school enrolment has been eradicated at lower levels of education, it persists in completion rates and women continue to lag behind in tertiary education. Economic opportunities for women have expanded, but official statistics suggest that the bulk of working women are concentrated in home-based self-employment (Gov. of Bangladesh, 2011). The norm of the male breadwinner remains strong in policy and popular discourse as does women's secondary earner status. *Purdah* persists as a powerful form of social control over women's mobility and while most women

resort to some form of ‘veiling’ in the public domain, they continue to face various forms of harassment. This raises a question about the extent to which women’s access to new resources and opportunities have actually served to transform their position either at home or in the wider society. This paper draws on a combination of survey data and qualitative evidence to explore this question in greater detail.

## **A note on the research methodology**

### *Concepts and measures*

While existing efforts to quantify the empowerment potential of women’s access to paid work in the context of Bangladesh have generally reported positive results (Salway *et al.* 2005; Heath, 2014; Anderson and Eswaran, 2009), they have a number of limitations. First of all, they either focus on whether or not women were in paid work or else they focus on the impact of specific kinds of paid work, namely garment factory work and microenterprise. They do not distinguish between the different kinds of paid and unpaid economic activity that characterise women in Bangladesh. Secondly, their measures of empowerment tend to be confined to women’s role in household decision-making, their mobility in the public domain and, in some studies, the incidence of domestic violence. There has been far less attention to other aspects of gender dynamics in family and community life.

Our research sought to address these limitations. We conceptualized empowerment in terms of changes that went ‘against the grain’ of the structures of patriarchal constraint in the Bangladesh context, encompassing changes at the level of individual consciousness, family relations and community interactions (Kabeer, 2008). We drew on this conceptualization to design a survey questionnaire that captured these dimensions through three sets of questions.

The first set related to individual values and perceptions. It asked women about the importance they attached to their productive contributions to the family, whether paid or unpaid; whether they felt they had some control over what happened in their lives<sup>1</sup>, a question intended to capture their ‘sense of agency’; and finally, in view of the strong culture of son preference, whether, if they could have only one child, they would prefer a boy, a girl or were indifferent.

The second set of questions sought to capture changes in intra-household gender relations. Women were asked how their families viewed their productive contributions to the household, whether paid and unpaid; whether they had a major say in relation to certain decisions (disposal of own earnings, own health care, routine daily purchases and purchase of productive assets); and finally, whether they had savings of their own.

The third set of questions focused on changes in the wider community. Women were asked how the community viewed their productive efforts and whether they were approached by others in the community for advice and information, both indicators of community attitudes. To capture political dimensions of change, they were asked whether they knew about labour laws and about social protection programmes; whether they had voted in recent elections and of those who voted, whether they had voted according to their own judgement or according to the wishes of others; whether they had campaigned in the local and national elections; whether they had participated in the *shalish*, informal justice forums operating at village level; and whether they had participated in any form of collective action to protest injustice or claim their rights.

In addition, women were asked about mobility in the public domain in order to ascertain possible change in norms of female seclusion. The questions on mobility distinguished between visits to

health clinics, likely to be an acceptable location, given women's responsibilities for family care, and visits to local markets and to rural committees/shalish, less socially acceptable locations since they relate to male sphere of responsibilities. Since some women might visit these locations out of necessity, our questions were framed to ask whether they felt comfortable visiting these locations on their own.

Women's economic activities were the central explanatory variable in our study. In keeping with our basic proposition that the cultural meaning and transformative potential of paid work might vary for different types of work, we classified women's work according to two analytically significant characteristics: location and remuneration. This gave us four categories: market-oriented work outside the home; market-oriented work within the home; unpaid economic activity within the home and economic inactivity.

On theoretical grounds, we expected paid work outside the home to carry greater transformative potential than work within the home because of its greater social visibility and remunerated status (Sen, 1990). At the same time, such work was also most likely to violate purdah norms and reflect adversely on the households' social standing in the community. This suggested that the relationship between paid work and women's empowerment was unlikely to be a straightforward one, but partly mediated by considerations of cultural norms and household status.

Along with paid work, our survey collected data on a number of other critical resources which are hypothesized in the wider literature to have transformative potential. Both education and access to media are considered to expand women's knowledge and exposure to new ideas (see Jejeeboy, 1995; Jensen and Oster, 2009). We sought to measure this through questions about women's education levels, about whether they had viewed TV in the previous week and whether they owned a mobile phone. Ownership of productive assets, also considered to be empowering (see Agarwal, 1994), was measured by whether women owned any residential property (homestead land or housing) in their own name, a more likely possibility than ownership of cultivable land.

While most microfinance NGOs in Bangladesh provide access to credit, itself considered an empowering resource, their focus on group formation, often combined with various forms of skills and legal literacy training, has been seen as having independent transformative potential (Hashemi et al. 1996). We therefore used membership of NGOs as well as access to loans to capture two potential pathways through which these organisations might bring about change.

Along with these explanatory variables, we controlled for a number of variables likely to have direct or indirect influence on the changes we were interested in: individual characteristics (such as women's age, marital status and religion), household characteristics (such as wealth and gender and education of head) and geographical location. There is some debate in Bangladesh as to whether wearing burkah/hijab signifies adherence with cultural/religious norms and hence a likely indicator of conservatism or a strategic decision to enable freedom from harassment in the public domain, an interpretation more consistent with our empowerment indicators (Rozario, 2006). To throw some light on this debate, we included a question on whether women routinely wore burkah/hijab when they left their home.

#### *Data collection*

Our research methodology was influenced by the growing literature on the value of combining quantitative and qualitative data in efforts to make sense of social phenomena (Campbell and Holland, 2005). We therefore sought to use our survey data to quantify the relationship between women's access to certain critical resources, including paid work, and our various indicators of

empowerment while we drew on the qualitative interviews to gain insights into some of the causal processes through which access to critical resources might translate into change in women's lives.

We had collected our quantitative data through a survey carried out in 2008 as part of DFID-funded research programme on women's empowerment<sup>2</sup>. Respondents were selected from locations spread over eight districts in Bangladesh, chosen to represent different socio-economic conditions. Faridpur and Narayanganj represented urban/peri urban locations; Chapainabganj, Maulvibazaar and Comilla were considered to be among the more socially conservative; Tangail was one of the more prosperous areas in the country; while Kurigram and Bagerhat were among the poorest. We randomly selected 12 villages each from five of our districts. We also purposively selected 4 villages from Comilla and from Tangail and one from Faridpur on the basis of prior research in these villages. A preliminary census was carried out on all women aged 15 and above in the selected locations, giving a total of 35,494 women. These women were classified into four categories based on their primary occupation, and proportionate random samples of 625 women were selected from each location. This gave us a total sample of 5198 women aged 15 and above.

After we had conducted preliminary analysis of our survey data, we used qualitative methods to explore the meaning of our quantitative findings. This involved semi-structured interviews with a sample of 50 respondents drawn from four of the survey locations and selected to represent the different economic activities covered by the survey. Consent to participate in qualitative interviews was obtained when we contacted those who had been selected for the interviews. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was organized very loosely around their life histories. The conversational format allowed us to explore in greater depth how the women viewed the critical resources that had featured in our survey. However, given limitations of space, we confine our discussion in this paper to their views about paid work.

### **Profile of sample respondents**

We had intended to conduct our analysis on the basis of the four categories of economic activity outlined earlier, but preliminary analysis of the survey data made it clear that the women working outside the home were a very heterogeneous category and included some of the poorest as well as some of the most affluent women in our sample. We therefore divided this category into three further sub-categories: formal/quasi-formal waged work, informal waged work and informal self-employment outside the home. Table 1 reports on the individual and household characteristics of women in the resulting 6 categories. It should be noted that for a variety of reasons, including more careful questioning, our survey found a higher percentage of women in market-oriented self-employment within the home than official statistics and hence higher overall rates of female labour force participation (Mahmud and Tasneem, 2011).

3.5% of our sample were found to be in formal/semi-formal waged work. This referred to forms of wage work that were characterized by regularity in earnings, often paid on a monthly basis, for organizations that were usually formally registered. A third of these women worked in export garment factories while the rest were employed in various forms of community-based services provided by government and NGOs.

6% of our sample were informal waged workers, either domestic servants or daily wage labourers in agricultural and non-agricultural activities while 3.6% worked in informal self-employment outside the home either on the family farm or in petty trade and service provision. 13 percent of the women in our sample were thus classified as working outside the home.

47% were in market-oriented self-employment within the home, making up the single largest category, while 17.5% were in unpaid economic activity. Both these groups were primarily engaged in rearing livestock and poultry, homestead cultivation and making handicrafts but the former regularly sold some or all of their products while the latter produced largely for use or consumption by the family. Finally 22% were economically inactive.

Formal/semi-formal wage workers were considerably more educated than women in other categories, more likely to have watched TV and more likely to own a mobile phone. While most were married, as was the overall population, they were younger than other categories and had fewer children. Along with women in unpaid economic activity and economically inactive women, they were more likely to come from the wealthiest third of households and to have educated household heads.

Women in informal waged work were clearly the poorest in our sample. They were far less likely than any other category to have any education (none had post-secondary education), their household heads were also less likely to have any education, they were less likely to have access to TV, none of them owned a mobile phone and 80% came from the poorest third of households in the survey. They were somewhat older than the rest, more likely to be widowed, divorced and separated and more likely to report themselves as household heads. The high incidence of female headship in this group probably explains why they were also more likely to report owning their home or homestead land but this did not amount to more than few decimals of land and a hut.

Women in self-employment outside the home differed from those in home-based self-employment in a number of ways. They were more likely to be single, more likely to head their own households and had higher levels of education. Women in self-employment within the home, whether market or consumption-oriented, had very similar demographic profiles in terms of age, marital status and female headship but those in market-oriented activity were poorer than those producing for own consumption.

The economically inactive women in our sample were the wealthiest category in our sample and, along with women in formal waged work most likely to report educated household heads. However, the fact that they had lower levels of education than women in formal waged work suggests that their inactivity may have partly reflected their greater difficulty in accessing socially respectable forms of employment.

A number of other points are worth noting. First of all, while most women took primary responsibility for care work and household chores, regardless of their work status, there was greater variation in responsibility for care work than household chores, possibly because variations in marital status and children. Interestingly, economically inactive women were least likely to report primary responsibility for either forms of work, possibly because as the wealthiest group, their households could afford to hire others to do this work.

Secondly, levels of NGO membership were higher among economically active categories of women than the economically inactive. The three largest NGOs in the country, BRAC, ASA and Grameen, accounted for around 70% of NGO membership in the sample. Levels of borrowing did not vary systematically by work category but of those who borrowed, over 80% borrowed from NGOs.

Around 90% of the women in our sample were Muslims, with Hindus making up the rest. While Muslim women obviously made up the majority in each work category, Hindus were more likely to be found in informal work outside the home. Around half of the women in the sample - of



whom 99% were Muslims - routinely wore burkah/hijab when they left the home. They were more likely to be found in home-based activity and to come from wealthier households.

In terms of location, women in the urban/peri-urban areas of Faridpur and Narayanganj were predictably more likely than others to be in formal wage employment (with those in urban Narayanganj most likely to be in the garment sector). Women in Comilla and Chapainababganj, both selected as examples of socially conservative areas, were least likely to engage in work outside the home – Maulvibazar, also selected for its social conservatism, did not conform to our expectations. Kurigram, the poorest location in our sample, reported the highest percentages of women in informal waged work and the lowest percentage of economically inactive women.

Table 2 highlights some differences in perceptions and conditions relating to different categories of activity. Most economic activities were carried out throughout the year but they varied considerably in terms of hours of work per day. In general, waged work involved longer hours of work per day while economic activity within the home involved fewer hours, possibly because it was more likely to be combined with domestic responsibilities.

Formal/semi-formal work carried more benefits than informal economic activity, as might be expected, but these benefits were unevenly distributed with many not enjoying any benefits at all. The conditions associated with different categories of work varied in other ways as well. Women working outside the home were more likely to report harassment and abuse at work than those working from home. They were also likely to report adverse effects of work on their health, particularly those in informal waged work. Finally, women in self-employment within the home were more likely to express satisfaction with their work and their work environment than those working outside. There are many reasons why this might be the case: compatibility with cultural norms, the ability to combine income-generation with domestic responsibilities and awareness of the harassment associated with outside work. Those working in informal waged work were least likely to express satisfaction either with their work environment or with their work. Given the poverty of these women, and the high percentage of divorced, separated and widowed women among them, informal waged work clearly represented distress sales of labour rather than the pull of economic opportunities.

### **Paid work and women's empowerment: bivariate analysis**

We use bivariate analysis to begin exploration of the relationship between women's economic activities and our empowerment indicators. The first three indicators in Table 3 relate to individual values and attitudes. We find that women in formal waged work were most likely to report that the productive work they did was 'very important' for their households followed in order by those in informal waged work, those in informal self-employment outside the home, those in paid self-employment within the home and finally, those in unpaid economic activity. Economically inactive women were least likely to express this view. Clearly perceptions of the importance of their own work contribution were strongly influenced by its social visibility and its remunerated status.

There was a loose relationship between expressions of son preference and paid work outside the home, with women in formal paid work least likely to express son preference. The relationship between work status and women's sense of control over their own lives was less consistent but it is worth noting that women in formal employment were more likely than the rest to express it while those in informal wage employment were least likely.

The next set of indicators relate to family relationships. As far as women's views about their families' perceptions of their productive contribution, once again, remunerated status and social visibility appeared to matter, leading to a close correlation between women's own views and those of their family. There did not appear to be a systematic relationship between women's work status and intra-household decision-making. Own savings were more likely to be reported by women in formal employment, followed by women in self-employment of various kinds and least likely to be reported by economically inactive women. It is worth noting that women in informal waged work were more likely than the overall average to make major decisions about disposal of their income, about their own health and about daily purchases. It is likely that the higher incidence of divorce, separation, widowhood and female headship in this group accounted for both their greater poverty as well as their greater autonomy.

The final set of indicators relate to women's agency and interactions in the public domain (Table 3). As far as community perceptions of women's productive contributions were concerned, once again positive perceptions appeared to reflect considerations of remunerated status and social visibility, with over 20% of those working outside reporting positive views compared to 15% of those in paid work within the home and just 9% of those in unpaid economic activity. What is worth noting however is that the percentages of women reporting positive community perceptions were far lower than the percentages reporting positive self and family perceptions.

Knowledge about government anti-poverty programmes was extremely high (over 95% of overall sample) with little variation by work category. This is likely to reflect widespread dissemination by both media as well as NGOs. However, only 14% of the overall sample had heard about labour laws, although this rose to 48% among the small minority of women in formal waged employment: these were mainly women in the garment sector. This aspect of entitlements did not apply to most women and had clearly not received equivalent public attention.

As far as being consulted by others in the community for information and advice, women in formal employment were more likely to report this than other categories while women in informal waged work were least likely. Voting in national elections was uniformly high (90% or more) across work categories among those who were eligible and registered to vote. The percentages voting in local elections were lower and there was greater variation by work category with women in informal waged work most likely to vote! One reason why fewer women in formal waged work voted in local elections was that a third of them were garment workers who had migrated from the countryside to take up work and would have had to return to their place of origin to vote. They were often given a holiday by employers to vote in national elections but not in local elections. Of those who voted in local elections, women in waged work, both formal and informal, were more likely to make their own independent decision about voting than women in other categories. Only 1-2 % had taken part in electoral campaigns.

Women's responses about visiting different locations outside the home on their own varied by both category of work and the location in question. Not surprisingly, women in outside work reported greater ease in the public domain than those based in the home. Also predictably, given its association with their domestic responsibilities, all categories of women were more comfortable visiting the health centre and least comfortable visiting community decision-making forums, such as rural committees and *shalish*.

Consistent with the last finding was the very small percentages of women who had participated in a *shalish*. The fact that women in informal waged work were more likely than other categories to have taken part in a *shalish* is very likely to reflect the fact that these women were more likely to be divorced or separated than other categories and hence to have attended as parties to a dispute rather than as decision-makers. Finally, less than 1% of our sample had engaged in any form of collective action to protest injustice or claim rights.

Our bivariate analysis thus suggests that the paid status of women's work had a bearing on its transformative potential. While we found this result most consistently in relation to formal work, which accounted for just 3% of our sample, it was also evident among those in other forms of paid work, particularly paid work outside the home. However, as we saw from Table 2, women in different categories of work have very different individual and household characteristics, both in terms of their access to other critical resources which are hypothesized to have a direct influence on empowerment outcomes as well as in terms of age, religion, access to media and location, which are likely to mediate how these influences are experienced by different groups of women. In the next stage of our analysis, therefore we use multivariate regression analysis in order to separate out the impacts of different critical resources, while controlling for various individual, household and location-specific characteristics that might have a bearing on these relationships.

### **Paid work and women's empowerment: multivariate analysis**

Given that most of our empowerment indicators were discrete rather than continuous variables, we transformed them into dichotomous variables and used logistic regression techniques to analyse our data. This allowed us to assess likely impacts associated with different categories of work in relation to a reference category of women which was, in most of the regressions, the economically inactive. In cases where the empowerment indicator related to women's earnings, we excluded non-earning women from the regression and used women in self-employment within the home as our reference category. A number of variables from Table 3 were dropped from the regression analysis: indicators of empowerment which were either uniformly high across the population (such as percentages voting in national elections) or uniformly low (such as participation in collective action) as well as explanatory variables which added little to the explanatory power of the equations, such as education of household heads and responsibility for unpaid domestic responsibilities. Interestingly, while NGO membership proved significant for many of the empowerment indicators, access to loans did not. It may be that the effects of loans are being captured by NGO membership or by engagement in informal self-employment. Alternatively, of course, it may be the case that loans per se had little empowerment potential. The results of the regression analysis relating to the individual and family indicators are reported in Tables 4 while those relating to community-based indicators are reported in Table 5.

The regression results, by and large, are consistent with those of our bivariate analysis in that they suggest that, controlling for other possible influences, paid work was more likely to be positively associated with out empowerment indicators than unpaid work and economic inactivity. At the same time, they highlight certain variations in these associations. As far as individual indicators were concerned, they suggest that economically active women, regardless of precise form of economic activity, were more likely than the economically inactive to consider their productive contributions to be important. Women in formal paid work and those in paid self-employment within the home were more likely than the rest of feel a sense of agency in relation to their lives. However, variations in work status did not appear to have a bearing on expressions of son preference.

Turning to indicators relating to family relationships, we find that economically active women were more likely than the economically inactive to believe that their families gave importance to their productive contributions. Women in formal waged work were more likely to have a major say in decisions about the disposal of their own income, their own health care and the purchase of productive assets. Women in other forms of economic activity, both within and outside the home, were more likely than the economically inactive to make decisions about their own health, small daily purchases and (with the exception of informal wage workers) the purchase of

productive assets. And finally, with the exception of women in informal waged work, women in paid work were more likely to have savings of their own.

Table 5 suggests that those in waged employment (both formal and informal) were more likely than the rest to believe that their productive contributions were viewed positively by the community. It also suggests that women in formal paid work and those in outside self-employment were more likely to have been consulted by others in the community for advice and information while those in informal waged work were less likely. Women in formal employment were generally more likely to have voted in the last local election while of those who voted, they were most likely to say that they had voted according to their own judgement. Finally, the table suggests that women in waged employment, both formal and informal, were most likely to report greater ease of mobility with regard to all three locations while economically inactive women were least likely.

The other critical resources in our analysis also appeared to be significantly and positively associated with our empowerment indicators, but the strength of the association varied considerably by indicator. Of these, education, particularly post-primary education was most consistently associated with empowerment indicators at individual, household and community levels. Ownership of residential assets, NGO membership, access to TV and ownership of phone were all associated with a number of individual and household indicators, with mobility in the public domain but association with other community level indicators were weaker.

Some brief comments on patterns of association between other individual and household characteristics and our empowerment indicators are in order. Women's life course clearly had a bearing on their experience of change but it is difficult to ascertain on the basis of cross-sectional data whether this reflects the fact that various empowerment indicators, such as mobility in the public domain and consultation by others, was likely to decline with age or that older women were generally more conservative.

It is evident that 'patriarchal risk' continued to structure women's life experiences but the relationship was not a straightforward one. Widowed, divorced and separated women were less likely than married women to value their own work or make decisions about the purchase of productive assets or having savings of their own but they did have a major role in decisions about their earnings and health care, indicative perhaps of the fact that they had to take responsibility for themselves. They were also more likely to vote according to their own decisions when they voted and to report some mobility in the public domain.

The results associated with women who described themselves as household heads are worth noting. While female household heads in Bangladesh have traditionally been regarded as casualties of patriarchal risk because they were generally divorced, separated and widowed women without adult male support, the female heads in our sample did not appear to fall in this category, suggesting that the processes that lead to female headship may be changing: only 56% were divorced, widowed or separated, 34% were currently married and 12% were single. Single women who described themselves as household heads were likely to have migrated on their own in search of jobs while many of the married women who described themselves this way had husbands who had migrated to other parts of Bangladesh or had gone abroad. Whatever the reason, these women were more likely than single, married, widowed and divorced women in male-headed households to work outside the home, to value their own productive efforts, to believe that their efforts were valued by their families, to express a sense of agency, to exercise voice in household decision-making, to have their own savings, to vote according to their own decision when they did vote and to report greater mobility in the public domain.

Household wealth appeared to have a positive relationship with empowerment indicators within the home, less so outside it. Women from wealthier households were more likely to express a sense of control over their own lives and weaker son preference, to make decisions about use of income and purchase of assets and to have their own savings but they did not themselves view, or believe that their families viewed, their contribution as important and aside from greater likelihood of being consulted by others, they did not report positively on other community level indicators. Household wealth thus appears to give women a greater sense of autonomy on some issues, while imposing restrictions on others.

Religion made a difference. Muslim women were more likely than women from religious minorities to say that they valued their own work and to report mobility in the public domain and less likely to report son preference<sup>3</sup> but also less likely to have a say in the purchase of productive assets. Conformity to religious/cultural norms also made a difference. Controlling for various confounding influences, Muslim women who routinely wore burkah/hijab were less likely to value their own work than those who did not, less likely to report mobility in the public domain and more likely to report son preference. However, they were also more likely to have a say in the purchase of productive assets and to be consulted by others, signalling perhaps the respect accorded to those perceived to adhere to religious/cultural norms. Finally, we did not find any systematic variation in empowerment indicators by geographical location. The only consistent finding was the Comilla appeared to be more conservative than other districts by our different empowerment criteria

### **Paid work and women's empowerment: qualitative insights**

Our cross-sectional analysis helps to establish the extent to which there was a positive and significant relationship between women's access to certain critical resources and selected indicators of empowerment. Paid work, both within the home and outside it, emerges as among the more significant of these resources, with formal paid work as the most consistently positive and significant. However, as is widely accepted within regression analysis, correlation does not imply causation. While our general assumption is that the direction of causation runs from women's access to these resources to changes in their attitudes, agency and relationships, in reality, the associations could well be due to the reverse relationship, with more empowered women more able to overcome social and cultural obstacles to taking paid work outside the home. Unfortunately, the problem of causality cannot be resolved econometrically with the variables at our disposal.

We turn instead to the qualitative data from our study to examine how some of the women from the survey sample viewed the impact of paid work on their own lives and on the lives of other women. While this does not offer a technical solution to the problem, it does provide empirically grounded insights into the possible pathways through which access to paid work impacted, or failed to impact, on manifestations of patriarchal constraint in women's lives. Our qualitative interviews suggest considerable variation in how women viewed the impact of paid work – as socially transformative, as individually empowering, as practical necessity and as survival imperative. They also suggest that these variations were partly related to the socio-economic status of the women concerned and their own experience of work. We use extracts from our interviews to convey these variations in perceptions along with the age, marital status, education levels and occupation of the interviewee.

The view that paid work was socially transformative was most likely to be articulated by women in formal or semi-formal employment with post-primary education. These women compared the

indignities that they associated with total dependence on male earnings with the enhanced sense of agency and self-respect that came with women having some earnings of their own. Lily (24, married, secondary education, NGO worker) spoke of the powerlessness she associated with such dependence: *Women were neglected when they did not work. Husbands who had an income sometimes did not give their wives any money or did not give them enough for their costs of living...* She believed that regardless of their husband's wealth, women needed their own income: *But even if a husband is a millionaire, there is still a need for women to earn their own income because otherwise they are not valued by society. They should have some means of strengthening their position.*

Khaleda (40, primary education, married, political party worker) also spoke of the humiliations of financial dependence: *Women's value has increased in the sense that they are not as powerless as they used to be. .... They would have to wait for whatever their husbands gave them and when they choose to give it to them.* In addition, she believed that domestic violence diminished when women started to earn because it eased men's frustrations as primary breadwinners, frustrations that they often took out on their wives: *Earlier men were the sole breadwinners. Women had to struggle with many children in the family. Whenever women needed something and men could not provide it, men would take it out by beating their wives. Now both husband and wife earn, their household situation improves and men don't feel the need to use violence.*

Hafiza (24, secondary education, married, community worker) spoke of the importance of earnings to women's ability to leave abusive relationships: *I believe that all girls should earn an income. Perhaps you don't know, but all women are neglected by their husbands. If a girl has some capital of her own, if she has the capacity to stand on her own feet, then if in the future a man causes any harm to her, she will be able to survive on her own and feed herself.*

Monwara (50, divorced, secondary education, unpaid economic activity) valued the fact that access to paid work allowed women to support their ageing parents. She contrasted this with earlier times when not only did most women lack the financial means to support their parents but would have found it difficult to do so after they got married: *If your husband does not allow you to support your own parent, you won't be able to. But if you are educated, and you earn an income, then even if your husband objects, you will still be able to support your parents.*

Shahara Begum (26, married, secondary education), herself involved in unpaid economic activity, believed that women underwent a personal transformation when they took up paid work: *You can tell as soon as you see a working woman. If she works and earns an income of her own, then there is a different sense about them. They have mental strength.*

These generalized views reflected beliefs about the larger impact of gaining some financial independence on women's position within family and society. Although they were offered as observations about a general phenomenon, they were more likely to be articulated by women whose own personal experience of economic activity (whether paid or unpaid) had been positive. Lily valued the ability to purchase things for herself and her children without having to rely on her husband's generosity. She also valued being able to help her mother financially from time to time. That this was still not socially acceptable was evident from the fact that while Lily's husband knew that she was helping her mother out, they both concealed this fact from her in-laws: *If I tell them, they will say I am giving away their son's money.*

Bilquis spoke of the personal transformation that she had experienced as a result of her work: *There is a change in me. Earlier I would stay at home, I wouldn't go out. Now I go out freely anywhere. Earlier I wouldn't talk to other people, I was at home and did not go out. Now I go out and talk to ten people, I have more courage. Now both husband and I are earning. I can educate my children and pay for household expenses.*

Morgina (28, married, primary education, domestic wage labour) reported that violence had diminished in her household for the reasons outlined by Khaleda earlier: *'If there is want in the house, then there is a lot of violence. My household suffered from want in the past ... but now both my husband and I work and there is less violence'*. Interestingly, she believed that this change in her marital relations partly reflected a generalized change in men: *'Perhaps men's mentality and attitudes have changed. I think perhaps they have changed along with the changing times'*.

References to changing attitudes on the part of men were echoed in other accounts. As we noted earlier, Lily's husband was aware that she was contributing financially to her parents but colluded with her to conceal this from his parents who would not have approved. Korimon (45, married, primary education, garment worker) left her young son in her mother-in-law's care when she worked and received regular help from her husband in her household chores: *'If he comes home first or if he is already at home because there is no work, he does the cooking. He doesn't leave it in the hope that I will do it when I come home.'*

Tilat (24, married, secondary education, NGO worker) had faced considerable opposition from her in-laws to her desire to work. Her father-in-law did not approve of women working (*'he is a bit Islamic in his outlook'*) while her mother-in-law accused her of putting her job before her children. However, her husband's support made it possible for her to stand up to their objections: *'He says, there is a need for her to work. She is educated, let her do something with her education. She will feel good and it will be good for the household as well. Without my husband's support, I could not have done this job. He sometimes helps with the household work. He washes the clothes or cleans the rooms.'*

Some women were more matter-of-fact about their work. For instance, Kajol (35, Class 5, married) made mats as a way of keeping busy once she finished her household work. She saw it as a useful way to pass her time, viewed her earnings as a supplement to her husband's breadwinning efforts, she felt he appreciated her contribution but she did not give it any significance beyond that. For other women, paid work was a practical necessity. Happy (27 years, Class 4, separated, garment worker) joined a garment factory when her husband left her. She saw her work as the best livelihood option available to her, she considered her working conditions to be satisfactory and she valued her ability to provide for her sons and her mother.

But for those who had been working for much of their lives in order to survive, the idea that paid work could be empowering simply did not arise. Charu (45 years, no education, widow, agricultural wage labour) said: *'I have always had to work, I can't sit around. I will get peace only when I am buried six feet under the ground... Do I have a choice about doing all this work? I have to do it. I have to run the household since I have no husband who could do it.'*

Jahanara (50, married, illiterate) was also the main breadwinner for her family. She did agricultural wage work when she could find it and relied on the patronage of her employer to feed her family when she could not. Paid work was a survival imperative, there was no question of empowerment: *'We poor constantly face crisis. It is a crisis every time we cannot bring an income home. It is a crisis when we have no food.'* She distinguished between the daily wage labour of the poor and the 'jobs' available to the educated: *'Our daughters work in other people's houses so their value has not gone up. Those who are educated have higher value... if our children could have studied, they could have got a job... their value increases if they get a job... They could eat and live well.'*

Still others had been forced to take up paid work because of a change in family circumstance. Rani (27, illiterate, divorced, agricultural wage labour) had returned to her father's house when her husband left her. She worked as a daily wage labourer in order to feed herself and her children. She did not believe that a woman without a husband had any value, no matter how hard

they worked nor did she believe that that paid work undertaken as a response to economic distress could ever be experienced as empowering: *No, a woman does not have increased value because she works or only under certain conditions. If I were living in my son's house today and earning a living, then my value would have increased. But there is no value given to my work because I am staying in my father's house. I am working to fill my stomach.* Although, unlike her married sisters-in-law, there was no one to discipline her or to tell her how to spend her money, she considered them more fortunate because they could rely on their husbands to feed them: *They do not have to go to the haat (market), they do not have to gather wood for fuel. They can sit at home all day, cook and eat.*

Khairun (44, Class 5, married, garment worker) had been forced to take up garment factory work because of the irregularity of her husband's earnings. Her day was divided between the harsh discipline of the factory floor and discharging her responsibilities at home: *We came to work in garment factories so that we could earn some happiness. But it is...unhappiness that rules our lives. We spend the whole day in a room, like a prison. We have to obey others. You can't just sit for a while to rest. I come back home after work. There is no gas. It is difficult to cook. I eat with my husband and my in-laws and then we go to sleep. We wake up early in the morning, I cook and then we rush off for work again. Where is the time? Can't people even fall ill?.. There is no peace.* The only peace, she added, came at the end of the month when she got her wages and they could pay their rent and eat together with their children.

### **Conclusion: revisiting the debate**

Returning to the debates about women's access to labour market opportunities, our findings offer qualified support for the empowerment potential of paid work. First of all, our survey findings suggest that while women in paid work were generally more likely to report positive impacts in relation to our measures of empowerment than the economically inactive, these results were most consistent in relation to formal paid work, generally a more regular and socially acceptable form of work for women than others. Economically inactive women were by no means the poorest in our sample, indeed they were among the more affluent but, controlling for other possible influences, they were least likely to be empowered by our criteria.

Our qualitative interviews supported this broad relationship and pointed to some of the causal pathways underpinning it. They suggested that the women in formal employment, who had higher levels of education than others, were most likely to report positive changes in their lives as a result of their own work experience, changes that led them to believe in the socially transformative nature of paid work. Women in other forms of economic activity did not necessarily make such societal-level claims but many reported positive experiences of paid work, experiences which reflected some easing of patriarchal constraint in their personal lives – such as reduced dependence on male earnings, diminution of domestic violence, greater appreciation and support from families and some independence of purchasing power. Those least likely to view paid work as empowering, either for themselves or for women in general, had either been working in harsh and exploitative forms of work all their lives in order to survive or else been precipitated into it by some misfortune.

Secondly, our findings suggest that the 'economic empowerment' associated with women's access to paid work and other material resources can go beyond voice and agency in market-related activity, as suggested in some of the development literature (eg Golla et al., 2012), to include other forms of tangible and intangible change, including reductions in domestic violence, courage in the public domain, enhanced political participation, greater status in the community and a greater sense of agency in relation to one's own life. Paid work, in other words, can act as a pathway to change beyond the economic domain.



At the same time, we found that access to paid work and the other critical resources that featured in our analysis generally had greater impact at the level of individuals and families than at the level of the community. Higher percentages of working women were likely to report positive self and family evaluations of their productive contributions than were likely to report positive evaluations of their work on the part of the community. While access to resources did promote mobility in the public domain, women were most comfortable in locations related to their domestic responsibilities, such as health centres, and least comfortable in relation to locations associated with male responsibilities, such as the market and rural committees. Levels of involvement in community decision making forums were very limited. While many women voted in both national and local elections, far fewer voted according to their own decisions. Even fewer had taken part in election campaigns, participated in village decision-making forums or engaged in collective action to protest injustice or claim their rights. In short, individual empowerment through education and work had not translated into greater voice within the community or collective efforts to challenge gender injustice.

Finally, there appears to be one important form of change underway that bodes well for the future. Many of the positive changes that women reported in their lives, such as their greater role in household decision-making, the family's positive views about their contributions and their greater mobility in the public domain could not have occurred without changes in their family relationships, including their relationships with dominant male members. This point was picked up in our qualitative research in terms of the support women received from their husbands, in standing up to their in-laws, for instance, greater, though by no means equal, sharing in domestic responsibilities, as well as the apparent reduction in domestic violence as more women began to share breadwinning responsibilities with men. Men, as one of our respondents claimed, appeared to be changing in their attitudes to gender relations along with women. Further research is necessary to explore this promising possibility in greater detail.

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## TABLES

**TABLE 1. Socio-economic profile of respondents by work category (% unless otherwise specified)**

	Formal waged work	Informal waged work	Informal self- employment (outside)	Market-oriented self-employment (home-based)	Unpaid economic activity (home- based)	Economically - inactive	All
Number of cases	181	306	187	2456	909	1159	5198
% of total	3.5	5.9	3.6	47.3	17.5	22.3	100.0
Mean age in years	30.5	39.9	35.7	35.2	35.5	36.4	35.6
Mean no. of respondent children	1.9	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.2	2.9	3.0
Mean no. of children <5	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3
Primary responsibility for care work	55.3	61.1	37.4	69.8	69.6	49.4	63.0
Primary responsibility for household chores	78.5	79.7	72.7	86.2	83.3	69.5	80.8
Household headed by respondent	14.9	33.0	19.8	8.1	9.2	9.0	10.6

Never married	17.1	3.9	29.4	7.2	7.9	17.3	10.5
Married	70.2	59.5	47.1	83.2	80.1	63.2	75.1
Widow	7.2	24.2	17.7	8.2	10.6	18.2	12.1
Separated/Divorced	5.5	12.4	5.9	1.3	1.4	1.3	2.3
Education: None	17.1	80.4	41.2	44.2	42.2	34.7	42.8
Primary	29.8	17.7	13.9	29.6	28.7	23.6	26.9
Secondary	22.7	2.0	25.1	23.1	24.3	31.6	24.0
SSC and above	30.4	0.0	19.8	3.1	4.7	10.1	6.3
Muslim	91.7	88.6	87.2	91.3	91.1	88.5	90.4
Wears burkah/hijab	44.2	25.5	47.1	56.9	59.3	56.5	54.6
Lowest wealth tercile	26.5	81.4	33.7	34.0	26.1	25.9	33.3
Middle wealth tercile	33.7	16.0	31.0	38.2	32.6	28.7	33.3
Highest wealth tercile	39.8	2.6	35.3	27.9	41.4	45.5	33.3
Watched TV in past week	63.0	15.4	43.3	29.3	30.8	46.7	34.3
Own mobile	24.3	0.0	6.4	4.2	6.7	7.9	6.0

phone							
Owns residential assets	12.2	29.1	17.1	10.0	11.4	9.0	11.5
NGO membership	40.9	39.9	36.9	42.6	33.4	26.8	37.1
Loan	47.5	61.1	41.7	52.2	45.5	34.6	47.1
Loan from NGOs (out of who took out loans)	81.4	80.2	88.5	83.4	76.1	77.6	81.0
Education of household head: None	36.5	82.4	48.7	50.7	44.9	36.8	47.9
Primary	24.9	15.0	21.9	24.6	25.7	27.3	24.7
Secondary	21.6	2.6	18.7	16.0	17.5	19.2	16.5
SSC and above	17.1	0.0	10.7	8.8	11.9	16.8	11.0
Faridpur	21.6	9.5	17.7	10.4	3.3	21.3	12.2
Comilla	3.3	7.8	2.1	16.3	12.2	7.1	12.1
Tangail	6.6	17.0	17.1	13.7	13.2	8.6	12.6
Chapanababganj	2.2	5.9	7.0	11.2	23.7	9.4	12.2
Maulvibazar	9.9	10.8	8.6	8.6	22.8	13.6	12.4

Bagerhat	5.0	8.5	13.4	13.0	9.2	14.0	12.0
Kurigram	5.5	35.0	12.8	18.5	6.2	3.4	13.3
Narayanganj Urban	42.0	4.3	15.5	4.0	3.6	18.6	9.0
Narayanganj Rural	3.9	1.3	5.9	4.3	5.8	4.0	4.4

**TABLE 2: Conditions and perceptions of work by work category (% unless otherwise stated)**

Occupation	Formal waged work	Informal waged work	Informal self- employment (outside)	Informal self- employment (home- based)	Unpaid economic activity (home-based)
Mean no. of months worked last year	10.6	8.8	9.7	11.3	10.7
Mean no. of hours worked per day	7.6	7.0	4.1	1.5	1.1
Does overtime work	38.7	-	-	-	-
Of whom, receives overtime pay	97.1	-	-		--
Entitled to maternity leave	41.4	0.7	1.1		

Entitled to paid annual leave	55.3	3.6	2.7	-	-
Negative work-related health effect	29.8	70.6	35.3	11.3	6.7
Faced harassment at work	22.7	31.4	6.4	8.8	6.2
Satisfied with work environment	59.1	18.0	56.2	66.5	64.1
Satisfied with work	35.4	9.5	30.0	43.6	35.8
Total numbers	181	306	187	2456	909

**TABLE 3. Indicators of empowerment by work category (% unless otherwise specified)**

	Formal waged work	Informal waged work	Informal self-employment (outside)	Informal self-employment (home-based)	Unpaid economic activity (home-based)	Inactive	All
<i>Individual-level indicators</i>							

Considers productive contribution to household to be 'very/quite' important	85.6	74.5	61.5	52.9	46.8	38.5	51.4
Believes she has control over own life	78.0	63.3	68.5	69.3	68.3	68.3	68.9
Would prefer son	34.8	37.3	37.4	42.8	38.6	41.9	41.1
<b><i>Family-level indicators</i></b>							
Family considers her productive contribution to household to be very/quite important	84.0	70.6	64.2	51.0	43.8	36.3	49.3
Major decision: use of own income	50.8	58.4	70.9	46.7	53.3		49.7
Major decisions: own health care	33.7	44.8	31.0	19.1	13.9	10.5	18.7
Take major decisions: small purchase	39.8	47.1	39.0	24.9	30.8	22.2	27.7
Take major decisions: productive asset	33.7	26.5	43.3	58.1	63.0	31.7	49.8
Has own savings	59.7	42.8	47.6	49.0	40.0	35.3	44.3
<b><i>Community-level indicators</i></b>							
Standing in community improved because of	25.7	21.6	21.1	14.5	8.9	--	15.9



productive work							
Heard of VGD	99.5	97.1	96.3	96.8	95.8	97.2	96.8
Heard of school stipend	100.0	97.4	99.5	99.3	99.6	98.8	99.2
Heard of OAP	99.5	97.1	98.9	98.8	99.2	98.4	98.7
Heard of widow's allowance	99.5	97.1	97.9	98.2	98.2	97.8	98.1
Knows about labour laws	47.5	6.9	21.4	10.8	13.9	16.7	14.1
Consulted by others	52.5	16.7	43.3	31.8	33.1	35.8	33.2
Ease of mobility-health centre	49.7	31.4	31.0	16.7	13.9	15.5	18.5
Ease of mobility-Markets	35.9	25.8	24.1	8.6	7.0	9.2	11.0
Ease of mobility-rural committee	17.7	14.7	7.5	7.4	3.5	4.0	6.8
Voted: national elections (registered)	90.0	90.8	91.7	89.7	91.7	90.6	90.3
Voted in local elections (registered)	65.2	89.7	69.3	78.4	75.0	66.7	75.3
Voted according to own decision (of those who voted)	71.1	65.1	59.7	53.9	59.1	53.8	56.4
Campaigned during last national election	1.7	1.7	1.3	0.6	0.9	0.8	0.8

Campaigned during last local election	4.1	2.0	2.7	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.6
Participated in Shalish	5.5	12.4	3.7	5.2	4.5	3.4	5.0
Participated in collective action	3.9	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.3

**TABLE 4 Paid work and indicators of women's empowerment at individual and household levels: logistic regression analysis**

Independent variables	Own valuation of productive work	Control over own life	Son preference	Family valuation of productive work	Major decision over income	Major decision over own health	Major decision over small purchases	Major decision over purchase of assets	own saving
Age	1.124***	1.024*	0.996	1.128***	1.020	1.103***	1.100***	1.123***	1.132***
	(0.0150)	(0.0131)	(0.0114)	(0.0151)	(0.0218)	(0.0210)	(0.0181)	(0.0158)	(0.0327)
Age squared	0.999***	.999**	0.999	0.999***	0.999	0.999***	0.999***	0.999***	0.998***
	(0.000160)	(0.000148)	(0.000131)	(0.000160)	(0.000264)	(0.000225)	(0.000196)	(0.000164)	(0.000361)
Never married	0.605***	1.191	0.722***	0.705***	2.336***	1.037	0.878	0.544***	0.861
	(0.0791)	(0.168)	(0.0898)	(0.0914)	(0.432)	(0.206)	(0.143)	(0.0786)	(0.169)

Widow	0.671***	1.054	1.359**	0.677***	11.40***	2.598***	1.191	0.607***	0.619**
	(0.0881)	(0.150)	(0.174)	(0.0877)	(3.194)	(0.429)	(0.194)	(0.0898)	(0.134)
Separated or divorced	0.689*	0.682	0.973	0.656**	9.402***	4.255***	1.115	0.375***	0.423*
	(0.146)	(0.159)	(0.190)	(0.137)	(3.778)	(0.941)	(0.260)	(0.0996)	(0.188)
Respondent head	2.087***	1.422***	1.007	1.817***	5.650***	8.302***	7.987***	0.786*	1.406*
	(0.259)	(0.187)	(0.115)	(0.215)	(1.202)	(1.089)	(1.151)	(0.0993)	(0.267)
Muslim	1.329**	0.824	0.641***	1.259**	0.775	1.197	1.165	0.772**	0.885
	(0.156)	(0.104)	(0.0720)	(0.146)	(0.122)	(0.193)	(0.169)	(0.0935)	(0.180)
Borkha/hijab	0.721***	0.982	1.251***	0.745***	0.899	0.864	0.947	1.487***	1.181
	(0.0542)	(0.0791)	(0.0907)	(0.0550)	(0.0905)	(0.0814)	(0.0799)	(0.122)	(0.147)
Primary education	1.061	1.266***	0.815***	1.172*	1.077	1.100	0.943	1.283***	1.463***
	(0.0862)	(0.111)	(0.0642)	(0.0949)	(0.120)	(0.124)	(0.0918)	(0.113)	(0.211)
Post-primary	1.009	1.766***	0.700***	1.174	1.465***	1.159	0.971	1.342***	1.702***
	(0.0983)	(0.189)	(0.0684)	(0.115)	(0.200)	(0.165)	(0.113)	(0.144)	(0.292)
Formal wage work	7.015***	1.886***	0.853	6.634***	0.390**	2.888***	1.204	1.660**	1.995**
	(1.665)	(0.401)	(0.149)	(1.531)	(0.147)	(0.677)	(0.250)	(0.340)	(0.542)
Informal wage work	3.907***	1.202	0.796	3.724***	0.566	3.459***	2.208***	0.965	0.954

	(0.654)	(0.200)	(0.120)	(0.608)	(0.200)	(0.695)	(0.384)	(0.169)	(0.268)
Outside self-employment	2.675***	1.010	0.875	3.194***	0.986	2.796***	2.220***	2.589***	1.852**
	(0.476)	(0.191)	(0.147)	(0.567)	(0.367)	(0.591)	(0.426)	(0.463)	(0.506)
Inside self-employment	1.799***	1.206**	0.927	1.773***	0.674	2.254***	1.452***	3.544***	1.344**
	(0.156)	(0.112)	(0.0775)	(0.153)	(0.216)	(0.307)	(0.162)	(0.338)	(0.194)
Unpaid economic activity	1.287**	1.063	0.884	1.245**		1.249	1.461***	2.691***	0.938
	(0.130)	(0.118)	(0.0892)	(0.126)		(0.206)	(0.184)	(0.305)	(0.166)
Residential assets	1.660***	0.857	0.813**	1.693***	1.791***	2.040***	1.631***	1.435***	1.370*
	(0.182)	(0.100)	(0.0850)	(0.182)	(0.279)	(0.252)	(0.194)	(0.175)	(0.246)
Ngo membership	1.266***	0.993	1.113	1.336***	1.045	1.082	1.071	1.046	340.1***
	(0.0843)	(0.0728)	(0.0738)	(0.0887)	(0.0934)	(0.101)	(0.0872)	(0.0758)	(59.44)
Watched TV	1.139*	1.016	0.972	1.029	0.988	1.264**	1.513***	1.110	1.576***
	(0.0881)	(0.0878)	(0.0752)	(0.0789)	(0.106)	(0.139)	(0.143)	(0.0956)	(0.214)
Own mobile phone	1.187	1.513**	0.591***	1.173	1.525**	2.981***	1.746***	0.874	2.007***
	(0.165)	(0.257)	(0.0877)	(0.163)	(0.318)	(0.498)	(0.288)	(0.135)	(0.389)
Wealth	0.963	1.172***	0.859***	0.999	1.253***	0.876**	0.873***	1.566***	1.156***

	(0.0335)	(0.0528)	(0.0412)	(0.0343)	(0.0961)	(0.0490)	(0.0358)	(0.0987)	(0.0544)
Faridpur	1.686***	1.028	0.617***	1.666***	1.279	2.271***	2.179***	1.535***	1.464*
	(0.224)	(0.153)	(0.0781)	(0.220)	(0.238)	(0.520)	(0.452)	(0.211)	(0.311)
Tangail	1.783***	3.640***	0.624***	2.108***	2.163***	4.087***	2.379***	1.291**	1.903***
	(0.226)	(0.639)	(0.0752)	(0.265)	(0.371)	(0.866)	(0.461)	(0.161)	(0.403)
Chapainababganj	2.280***	0.406***	0.377***	1.904***	1.791***	5.903***	16.55***	5.720***	2.925***
	(0.301)	(0.0565)	(0.0485)	(0.248)	(0.360)	(1.240)	(3.048)	(0.815)	(0.635)
Moulvibazar	2.155***	0.803	0.244***	1.723***	2.689***	3.719***	9.855***	10.51***	2.829***
	(0.277)	(0.109)	(0.0312)	(0.221)	(0.520)	(0.822)	(1.851)	(1.630)	(0.580)
Bagerhat	2.826***	0.711**	0.547***	2.683***	2.093***	4.534***	2.017***	0.518***	1.486*
	(0.356)	(0.0959)	(0.0651)	(0.337)	(0.366)	(0.976)	(0.405)	(0.0685)	(0.353)
Kurigram	0.995	0.290***	0.184***	0.842	1.341*	5.741***	7.167***	1.815***	2.281***
	(0.128)	(0.0391)	(0.0246)	(0.109)	(0.229)	(1.192)	(1.327)	(0.238)	(0.487)
Narayanganj urban	3.997***	0.345***	0.439***	3.203***	3.014***	4.966***	20.87***	0.394***	4.495***
	(0.610)	(0.0544)	(0.0636)	(0.481)	(0.711)	(1.219)	(4.322)	(0.0658)	(1.013)
Narayanganj rural	0.890	0.365***	0.390***	0.938	1.379	6.253***	6.850***	3.457***	2.345***
	(0.162)	(0.0635)	(0.0649)	(0.170)	(0.328)	(1.525)	(1.544)	(0.618)	(0.735)
Constant	0.0365***	1.936**	3.369***	0.0315***	0.425	0.00236***	0.00496***	0.0189***	0.00382***

	(0.0110)	(0.591)	(0.943)	(0.00951)	(0.242)	(0.00111)	(0.00199)	(0.00627)	(0.00222)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.1187	0.0965	.0769	0.0739	0.1684	0.2361	0.2297	.2229	0.6225
No. observations	5180	4944	5198	5180	2868	5198	5198	5198	5198

**TABLE 5: Paid work and indicators of women's empowerment within the community: Logistic regression analysis**

Independent variables	Community perceptions of women's work	Consulted by others	Voted in local election	Voted according to own judgement	Ease of mobility: health centre	Ease of mobility: markets	Ease of mobility; committees/sh alish
Age	1.078***	1.112***	1.817***	1.089***	1.090***	1.115***	1.171***
	(0.0305)	(0.0147)	(0.0553)	(0.0175)	(0.0218)	(0.0272)	(0.0415)
Age squared	0.999**	0.999***	0.995***	0.999***	0.999***	0.999***	0.998***
	(0.000356)	(0.000154)	(0.000359)	(0.000174)	(0.000248)	(0.000299)	(0.000450)
Never married	1.514*	0.870	0.260***	0.837	1.061	1.924***	1.948**
	(0.359)	(0.115)	(0.0785)	(0.331)	(0.173)	(0.386)	(0.533)
Widow	1.279	0.856	1.057	1.216	1.114	1.238	1.069
	(0.303)	(0.114)	(0.505)	(0.163)	(0.185)	(0.247)	(0.285)
Separated or divorced	1.002	0.912	0.648	1.807**	1.090	2.004***	1.856*

	(0.284)	(0.206)	(0.243)	(0.444)	(0.243)	(0.468)	(0.610)
Respondent head	1.764***	0.949	0.498***	1.847***	1.800***	2.110***	1.239
	(0.323)	(0.114)	(0.109)	(0.238)	(0.242)	(0.323)	(0.273)
Muslim	0.928	0.947	1.088	1.109	1.487***	1.382*	1.281
	(0.192)	(0.118)	(0.195)	(0.146)	(0.221)	(0.247)	(0.254)
Borkah/hijab	1.012	1.545***	0.913	0.957	0.636***	0.489***	0.512***
	(0.126)	(0.120)	(0.114)	(0.0815)	(0.0582)	(0.0569)	(0.0731)
Primary education	1.248	1.596***	1.101	1.285***	1.201*	1.257*	1.427**
	(0.177)	(0.138)	(0.150)	(0.115)	(0.128)	(0.165)	(0.231)
Post-primary	1.364*	2.191***	0.672***	1.804***	1.451***	1.530***	1.746***
	(0.240)	(0.224)	(0.101)	(0.214)	(0.181)	(0.238)	(0.329)
Formal wage work	1.769**	1.990***	1.685**	1.522*	3.012***	2.946***	3.004***
	(0.399)	(0.352)	(0.423)	(0.338)	(0.590)	(0.627)	(0.903)
Informal wage work	1.620***	0.538***	1.584	1.228	1.954***	2.338***	2.551***
	(0.299)	(0.0999)	(0.450)	(0.210)	(0.348)	(0.481)	(0.696)
Outside self-employment	1.269	1.669***	0.985	0.815	2.083***	2.208***	1.313
	(0.267)	(0.287)	(0.329)	(0.180)	(0.413)	(0.489)	(0.458)
Inside self-employment		0.973	1.186	0.965	1.143	0.989	1.520**

		(0.0852)	(0.171)	(0.101)	(0.127)	(0.140)	(0.298)
Unpaid economic activity		1.017	1.039	1.038	0.958	0.858	1.117
		(0.107)	(0.181)	(0.128)	(0.131)	(0.152)	(0.288)
Residential assets	1.168	1.085	0.917	1.101	1.614***	1.904***	1.942***
	(0.204)	(0.117)	(0.202)	(0.123)	(0.190)	(0.264)	(0.333)
NGO membership	1.089	1.041	1.590***	1.176**	1.489***	1.363***	4.303***
	(0.124)	(0.0734)	(0.169)	(0.0900)	(0.126)	(0.144)	(0.617)
Watched TV	1.308*	1.150*	1.048	1.150	1.258**	1.355**	1.480***
	(0.173)	(0.0908)	(0.127)	(0.109)	(0.122)	(0.167)	(0.214)
Own mobile phone	1.980	1.483***	1.764***	1.188	1.503**	1.588**	1.489
	(0.227)	(0.201)	(0.341)	(0.208)	(0.240)	(0.311)	(0.388)
Household wealth	0.986	1.193***	1.071	0.977	0.862***	0.873**	0.987
	(0.0783)	(0.0545)	(0.0684)	(0.0437)	(0.0445)	(0.0586)	(0.0637)
Faridpur	1.807***	2.738***	1.173	2.113***	5.529***	3.114***	17.15***
	(0.410)	(0.374)	(0.252)	(0.335)	(1.481)	(0.963)	(9.066)
Tangail	2.987***	0.684***	0.514***	6.595***	1.673*	1.105	2.987***
	(0.621)	(0.100)	(0.110)	(1.071)	(0.491)	(0.379)	(0.621)
Chapainababganj	1.323	0.977	2.071***	7.058***	4.310***	1.886**	1.323



	(0.323)	(0.148)	(0.443)	(1.140)	(1.174)	(0.608)	(0.323)
Moul vibazar	0.743	2.162***	1.672**	2.592***	8.257***	3.096***	0.743
	(0.204)	(0.287)	(0.351)	(0.393)	(2.146)	(0.925)	(0.204)
Bagerhat	1.568**	1.777***	2.103***	2.306***	8.829***	5.120***	1.568**
	(0.343)	(0.233)	(0.425)	(0.345)	(2.305)	(1.516)	(0.343)
Kurigram	0.460***	1.918***	1.412*	3.459***	7.445***	3.440***	0.460***
	(0.114)	(0.269)	(0.287)	(0.530)	(1.969)	(1.036)	(0.114)
Narayanganj - urban	0.877	1.263	0.354***	3.215***	12.00***	5.648***	0.877
	(0.262)	(0.191)	(0.0858)	(0.579)	(3.301)	(1.813)	(0.262)
Narayanganj -rural	0.668	2.323***	0.973	2.890***	17.43***	14.39***	0.668
	(0.237)	(0.405)	(0.299)	(0.574)	(4.937)	(4.541)	(0.237)
Constant	0.0242***	0.0148***	7.86e-06***	0.0422***	0.00365***	0.00215***	8.16e-05***
	(0.0148)	(0.00475)	(4.84e-06)	(0.0171)	(0.00172)	(0.00123)	(6.95e-05)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.0761	0.1028	0.5333	0.0802	0.1366	0.1619	0.227
No. observations	2891	5198	4828	3709	5198	5198	5198

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<sup>1</sup> The question was drawn from the World Values Survey.

<sup>2</sup> This data was collected as part of the DFID-funded Research Partners Consortium on Pathways of Women's Empowerment (2006-2011). The current analysis is being carried out as part of the ESRC/DFID project ES/L005484/1

<sup>3</sup> See Kabeer et al (2014) for a more detailed discussion of this finding