

Women's Strategies to Cope with Economic Coercion in Marriage: Case of Rural Bangladesh

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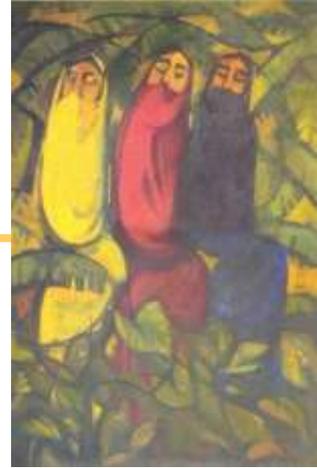
Background

- Economic violence (EV) is prevalent and eliminating it is necessary to achieve SDG5
- There are gaps in evidence about EV and how women cope with it in LMICs
- These gaps have limited our capacity to understand, document, and address EV
- The current study focuses on women's coping strategies to deal with EV in rural Bangladesh

Definitions

- **EV** is any implicit or explicit strategy to control the ability of a partner to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources (Adams et al. 2008)
- **Coping** is a process that deals with contextual influences and coping inconsistencies over time and across EV encounters (Lazarus, 1993)

Context



- Marriage is universal in Bangladesh
- Socially defined role of a woman is to produce children and to care for the family in exchange for maintenance by the husband
- A man is the breadwinner of the family and the woman is socially and financially dependent on him
- ***Purdah*** norm and restricted mobility limited economic opportunities of women.

Types of economic violence

Denial of access to:

- Employment
- Microfinance
- Access to and control over income

Damaging/selling of assets and imposition of economic burden



Methods

- Study design: Qualitative
- Study site: Rural Matlab
- Data collection methods: In-Depth Interviews
- Eligible participants: Married women living with spouse
- Sample size: 24



Sample characteristics

Individual

	Woman	Husband
Age in years, mean	33	41
Schooling, mean grades	7	6
Earns an income, no	19	-

Household

Years married, mean		15
Socioeconomic status, no:		
Poor		7
Middle class		12
Rich		5
NGO member, no		17

No negotiation, expecting penalty



- No engagement in negotiation and earning
- Expenditure saving by staying with natal family during food shortage
- Earning without his knowledge

Case Studies

“He used to send tk. 200 per month. ...Often there was no rice at home. I used to worry about survival. I could not figure out how to feed the children. I told him , “Let me get a job like yours.’ He did not allow it. He told me ‘People will talk.’ Now, isn’t that bad? That is why he did not take me along. ...

He says, ‘You’ll eat if I bring home food. If I don’t –you will go hungry. You will stay if you can accept this. Otherwise you can go back to your father’s home.’ So, I don’t bring this up anymore.” (IDI-9)

Making compromises for income earning

- Ensuring completion of household chores/child care
- Location of employment
- Type of employment
- Volume of work or working hours
- Dependence on husband's employment location
- Deferring employment

Deferring employment

- *“He wants me to do household chores and work on own farm. They don’t like women to work outside of home. At first he forbade me to offer tuition to children. Later he agreed upon condition that our children should not suffer because of my work. This is in a way saying, ‘no’. ...*
- *During my teaching hours others used to look after my son. People started criticizing this. Then all of a sudden my [one year old] son died of diarrhoea. I stopped working so that nobody can say that I harmed my children for an income.”*

Ignoring denial of employment, strategies: Case 1

Despite disapproval from the marital family and husband IDI-1 left marital home and joined garment work in response to husband's failure to recover her gold from the pawnbroker.

Penalty

- Husband stopped all communication
- Marital family threatened to get another wife for him
- He tested her fidelity by making friends call her
- The marriage was at the brink of a breakdown

Coping strategies Case 1

- She was patient and passed all the tests
- Gradually the relationship was mended. She conceived, left the job to come back to marital home 3 yrs after she left it.
- She invested Tk,20,000 (USD250) for renovating the house
- She bought land in his name investing USD 1,000
- The relationship with the marital family was redefined
- The in-laws do not object to her earning anymore
- She teaches at a school and works as a tailor

Ignoring denial of employment, strategies: Case 2

- Works as a home-based teacher in a government program
- Expanded teaching going door to door
- Takes loans from NGOs
- Raises poultry and sells product at the market herself

Barriers in employment

- Parents-in-law (outside employment)
- **Imams** (competition for recruiting students)
- Community members (outside employment/NGO membership)

Coping strategies Case 2

- Radically improved financial condition of the family
- Invested in renovating the house, built a kitchen and toilet
- Provided parents-in-laws with many amenities
- Pacified *Imams* by not working in certain village
- Begged pardon and apparently withdrew NGO membership
- Networked with political leaders and wealthy villagers
- Supported the ruling political party to organize events

Discussion



Not employed; not negotiating

Failed to successfully negotiate previously

- Waiting for an opportune moment for a fruitful negotiation
- Feel frustrated and do not see any benefit in negotiation
- Threatened by husband with divorce
- Did not accept conditions imposed by husband or failed in fulfilling the condition

Coping is a continuous process

- Women who are not employed and not undertaking any negotiations are engaged in negotiations or may negotiate
- Changing environment and reevaluating their situation may make passive women actively negotiate employment
- The same is applicable to women who made compromises and could not achieve the desired employment outcome

Coping strategies best depicted in case studies

- Women weigh pros and cons of their response to EV and choose strategies that consider their environment
- They may use different coping strategies currently or over time (not negotiating, waiting, being proactive, stepping back)
- Most women undertake negotiations for employment and most end up earning some income
- Women have much to learn from each other about coping
- Programs have much to learn from women about coping

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