

Measurement of *Women's Agency* in Rural Egypt

Kathryn M. Yount,¹ Kristin VanderEnde,¹ Yuk Fai Cheong,¹ Rania Salem,² Sarah Zureick-Brown,¹
¹ Emory University, ² University of Toronto

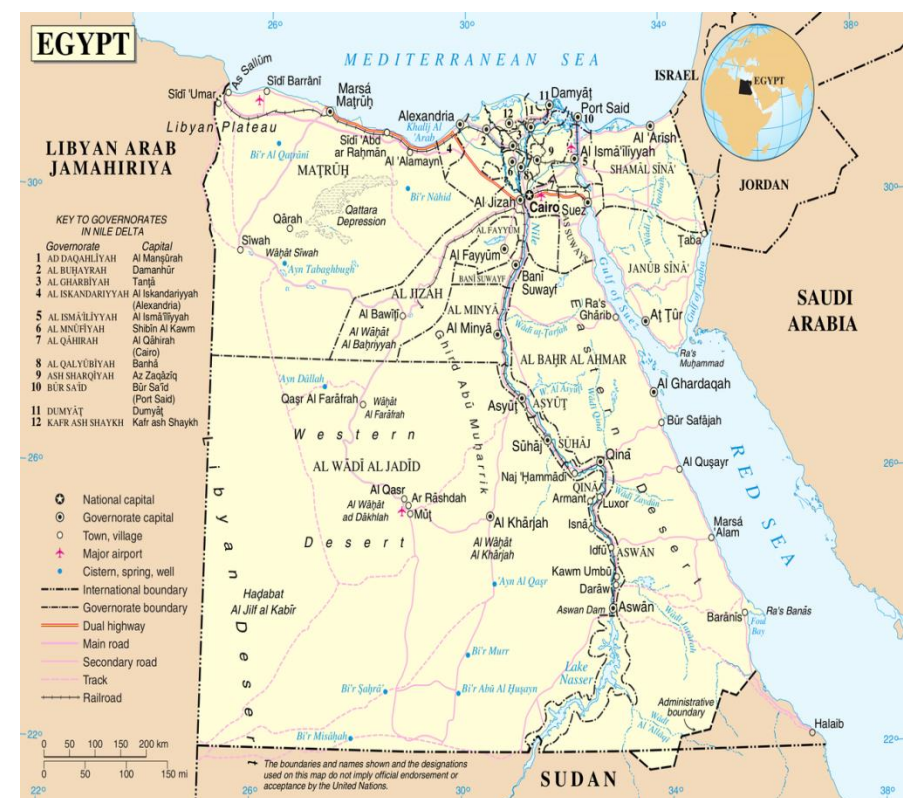
Introduction

Women's agency, and especially its determinants and effects, has long been a focus of research in the social sciences; yet the measurement of women's agency, particularly in *Middle Eastern* settings, has been under-emphasized,



clouding interpretations of its use as an outcome or predictor. Using the second wave of panel data from **608** ever-married women, we employed factor analysis to explore the measurement of women's agency in rural Minya, Egypt. We hypothesized that women's agency is a **multidimensional construct**, with positive correlations among these domains. Our final, 21-item model consisted of three factors (**decision making, freedom of movement, and equitable gender role attitudes**) each corresponding to a well-theorized dimension of women's agency. The three factors were positively correlated, lending further support to research presenting women's agency as a multidimensional construct. Future research should validate this measurement model in rural as well as urban Egypt and elsewhere.

Data and Methods



Data:
608 ever-married women aged **22-65 years** from rural **Minya, Egypt** who participated in the 2005 Egypt DHS and our follow-up survey in 2012. The survey included questions about women's role in **household decision-making, women's freedom of movement, and women's gender attitudes.**

Methods:

- 1) We ran an **exploratory factor analysis** (EFA) with 25 items, examining and interpreting model fit indices and factor pattern loadings.
- 2) We removed **negatively** loading items and items **with cross-loadings** from the model one at a time. The eliminated items included **two items** related to **gender attitudes** and two items related to **decision making.**
- 3) We explored the **construct validity** of our measure of women's agency. Using exploratory structural equation models, we assessed the association of **women's age** with each of the three dimensions of women's agency.

Results

Indicators of *Women's Agency*, Minya, Egypt (N=608 ever-married women)

DECISION-MAKING	SOE	You & SOE	You
Who in your family has the final say in purchasing the following things?			
Vegetables and fruit	12%	13%	75%
Clothes for yourself	20%	22%	57%
Any kind of medicine for yourself	24%	28%	48%
Toiletries for yourself (like hair oil, cream, or henna)	21%	19%	60%
Large household purchases (like a TV or any other electronic appliances)	42%	45%	13%

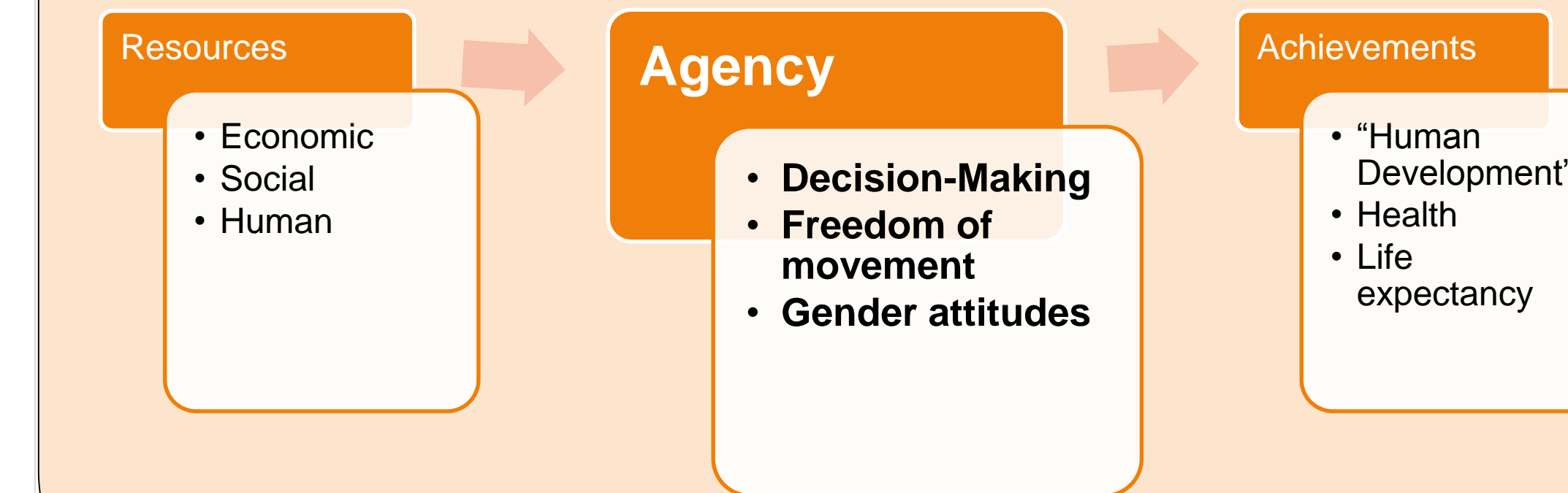
... and 5 more decision-making items

FREEDOM of MOVEMENT	Never	Not Alone	Alone
Are you allowed to go to the following places?			
To the local market to buy things	2%	23%	75%
To a local health center or doctor	1%	25%	74%
To the homes of your friends in the neighborhood	1%	22%	77%
To a nearby mosque or church	6%	25%	69%

GENDER ATTITUDES	Yes	Don't Know	No
In your opinion is a husband justified in hitting his wife in the following situations:			
If she goes out without telling him	57%	0%	43%
If she neglects the children	46%	0%	53%
If she argues/debates with him	34%	0%	66%
If she refuses to have sex with him	54%	4%	42%
If she burns the food	24%	1%	75%

... and 6 more gender attitudes items

Conceptual Framework for *Women's Empowerment* (Kabeer, 1999)



Factor Correlation Matrix

FACTOR	Decision Making	Freedom of Movement	Gender Attitudes
Decision Making	1		
Freedom of Movement	0.410*	1	
Gender Attitudes	0.211*	0.307*	1

* Significant at p ≤ 0.05

Associations Between Women's Age and Three Dimensions of *Women's Agency* (N=608 ever-married women)

Women's Age (ref <30 years)	Decision Making	Freedom of Movement	Gender Attitudes
30-39 years	0.165	0.170	-0.017
40-49 years	0.257†	0.095	-0.076
50+ years	0.406*	-0.166	-0.093

† Significant at p ≤ 0.10, * Significant at p ≤ 0.05

Conclusions

Our measure of *women's agency* is **multidimensional.**

Our final, 21-item model consisted of three factors, each corresponding to a well-theorized dimension of women's agency. In addition, the three factors were positively correlated, lending further support to research presenting women's agency as a multidimensional construct.

Our measure of *women's agency* is **context specific.**

Women's older age, as anticipated, was positively associated with women's decision-making agency, although women's age was not associated with the other domains of women's agency, freedom of movement and gender attitudes.

Measurement of *women's agency* in rural Egypt may be improved further.

As currently conceptualized, the measurement model does not capture political agency, which may be appropriate for the rural Egyptian context.

Likewise, the current items for decision making may reflect 'feminine' or relegated domains of decision making under classic patriarchy, and may not fully capture women's decision making agency in arenas typically reserved for men.

In the future, qualitative research should be used to develop items to explore these, and other emerging dimensions, of women's agency in rural Egypt.

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