

# Ceding Power in Intra-Household Bargaining in Times of Economic Anxiety: An Experimental Study in Nepal



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## Research Question

How do perceptions of one's economic status relative to that of others affect beliefs regarding women’s roles in decision-making?

## Hypothesis

- Individuals evaluate their economic conditions relative to others around them; if they are “primed” to feel poorer than others, this may heighten feelings of economic stress, which can have impacts on gender attitudes that differ for women vs. men
- Married women may be triggered to “cede decision-making power” in times of economic stress

## Project Overview

- We conducted a 2019 survey experiment with approximately 2,000 adult women and men in Nepal
- We employed an established survey treatment called a priming experiment to subtly alter respondents' perceptions of their relative economic well-being:
  - 50% (control condition): Primed to feel like the income distribution is narrow and they are in the middle of it
  - 50% (treatment condition): Primed to feel that the income distribution is wide and they are toward the bottom of it
- Goal is to assess whether being randomly assigned to feel relatively deprived affects subsequent answers about gender attitudes

## Relative Deprivation Prime

How much income did your family earn last month (in NRS)?

Response Option	Control Condition (50%)	Treatment Condition (50%)
1	<3,000	<25,000
2	3,000 – 6,000	25,000 – 50,000
3	6,000 – 9,000	50,000 – 100,000
4	9,000 – 12,000	100,000 – 200,000
5	>12,000	>200,000

## Procedure

**Step 1**  

Randomly assigned to a priming condition and read the response choices (1-5)

**Step 2**  

Asked what is their household income (5 discrete answer choices, or income brackets)

**Step 3**  

Asked about their subjective sense of their relative economic status

**Step 4**  

Asked about attitudes towards women's roles in intra-household decision-making (8 questions – assembled into index)

## The Prime Had its Intended Effect

Outcome: Subjective sense of relative economic status				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Deprivation Prime	-0.153** (0.0697)	-0.232** (0.0991)	-0.162** (0.0655)	-0.219** (0.0948)
Women		0.0613 (0.101)	0.112 (0.0742)	0.0540 (0.103)
Deprived × Women		0.152 (0.139)		0.110 (0.132)
Constant	4.961*** (0.0504)	4.929*** (0.0715)	4.441*** (0.520)	4.467*** (0.520)
Covariates	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	2010	2010	1957	1957

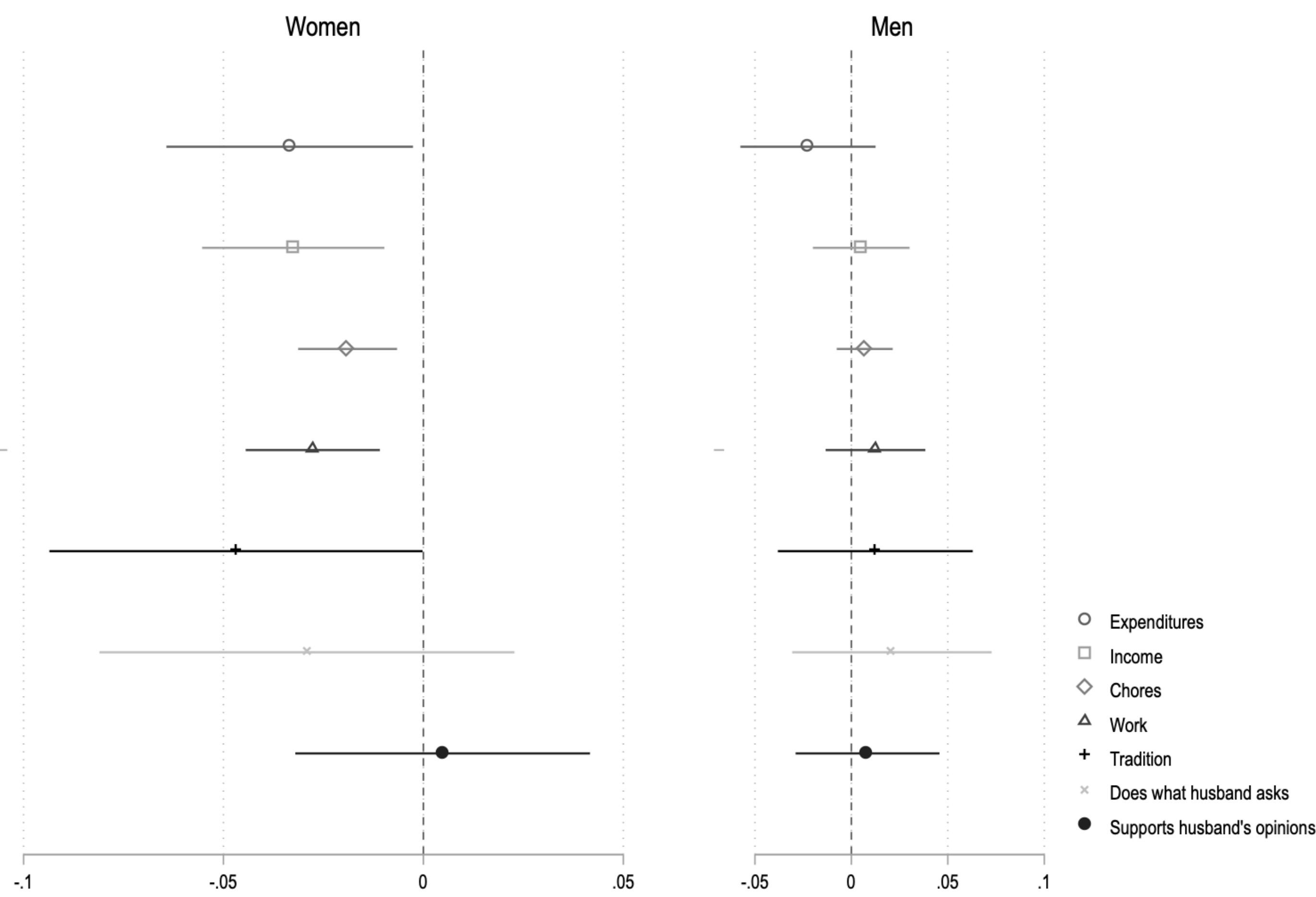
Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \* p<0.1, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01

## Measuring Attitudes Around Women’s Roles in Decision-Making

1. **EXPENDITURES:** In your opinion, to what extent should women and men have equal ability to decide how to spend the money their household earns from farming and other work? [1=A great deal, 2=A lot, 3=Moderately, 4=A little, 5=Not at all]
2. **INCOME:** Women and men should have equal control over income their household earns. [1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Slightly disagree, 5=Strongly disagree]
3. **CHORES:** Men and women should share household chores.
4. **WORK:** Women should be able to work outside the home if they want to.
5. **TRADITION:** Every individual should follow tradition, especially women.
6. **DOES WHAT HUSBAND ASKS:** It is important for a woman to do what her husband asks, even if she disagrees with him.
7. **SUPPORTS HUSBAND’S OPINIONS:** A good woman always supports her husband’s opinions.

\*All coded so that higher values mean more egalitarian gender attitudes

## Married Women, But Not Men, Become Less Egalitarian



- Being primed to feel poor makes married women more likely to say the husband should control expenditures and income, less likely to support sharing chores, less likely to feel it is okay for women to work outside the home, and more supportive of traditional norms.
- Men are largely unaffected

## Conclusion

- The results underscore the deleterious effects that feelings of relative deprivation can have on women’s own gender attitudes; women may cede power to avoid conflict within the household or may feel that fulfilling traditional roles is increasingly important in hard economic times
- These lessons are particularly relevant as income inequality within developing countries is on the rise (Ravallion, 2014), and given that the salience of inequality is also increasing (e.g., due to social media, migration and travel, etc)
- More work is needed on whether these impacts hold up to cases of real-world economic stress (beyond a survey experiment), how enduring these impacts are, and what are the contextual factors explaining women’s responses