



What decisions can women make in Rajshahi, Bangladesh?

Women's agency and perceptions of domestic violence

Data Note 28

December 2023

ABOUT THIS DATA NOTE | The

Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia (TAFSSA) district agrifood systems assessment aims to provide a reliable, accessible, and integrated evidence base that links farm production, market access, dietary patterns, climate risk responses, and natural resource management with gender as a cross-cutting issue in rural areas of Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. It is designed to be a multi-year assessment. Using data collected in February– March 2023, this data note describes women's say or agency in various household decisions, their physical and financial independence, their mobility, and their perceptions of domestic violence. This is one of a set of data notes that, together, provide a holistic picture of the agrifood system in the district.

Figure 1. District location in Bangladesh

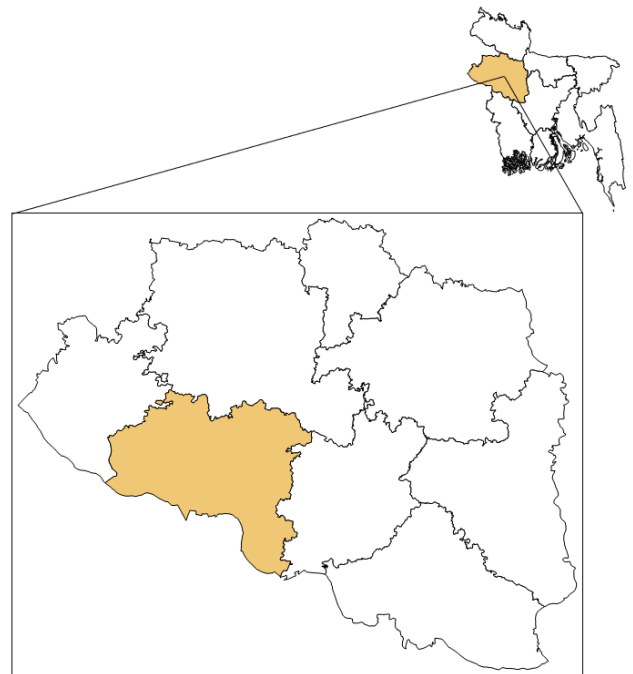


Figure 2. Highlights from this data note



5

Average years of education of adult women 20-71 years old



25%

Women make decisions alone about own health in households with adult men



14%

Women make decisions alone about field cultivation in households without adult men



74%

Women always need permission to go to health clinic in households with adult men



46%

Women justify beating from husband in one or more day-to-day scenario

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

TAFSSA’s district agrifood systems assessment aimed to interview three respondents per household: a female adult (aged 20+ years), a male adult (aged 20+ years), and an adolescent (aged 10-19 years). Information on the household and respondent sampling strategy is provided at the end of this data note.

In this data note, you will get a picture of critical aspects of women’s empowerment for the surveyed adult women (from the survey households), based on their responses. It begins with an introduction to background characteristics of these households, providing essential context for the sample. From there, we delve into indicators of women’s financial and physical independence.

You will also get insight into *what* decisions women can make. Respondents were asked who in the house is responsible for various decisions involving women’s own health, child-related matters, expenditures, agriculture, and food. Then we examine aspects of women’s mobility, as indicated by whether they need permission to travel to various destinations, including in the neighborhood, markets, healthcare facilities, or religious sites. You will also learn about their attitudes toward domestic violence against women in various scenarios that they may encounter in their daily lives.

Finally, we present a comparative picture for a selected set of these indicators between households with and without any adult male members. This provides a sense of the impact of adult men’s presence or absence on intrahousehold decision making and mobility among adult women. More detail about the measurement methods are found in the following pages.

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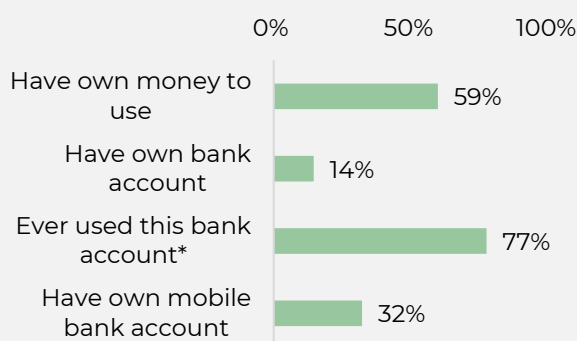
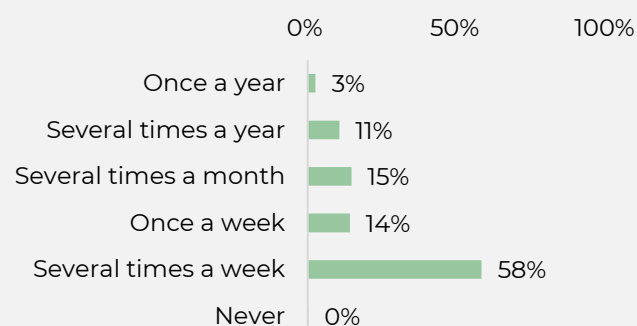
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Table 1. Household and individual characteristics

Household characteristics		Individual characteristics	Adult female
Number	1000	Number	967
Female-headed, %	8	Mean age, years	37
Education of head, years	5	Education, mean years	5
Average household size, members	4	Married, %	96
Involved in agriculture, %	91	Employed, %	9
Has improved toilet, %	98	Primary occupation, %	
Drinking water source		Unpaid household work	92
Tube well or borehole, %	89	Farming	2
Piped to neighbour, %	4	Casual farm-labor (paid)	0
Main source of income		Casual non-farm labor (paid)	1
Crop cultivation, %	41	Salaried employment	1
Business, %	25	Relation to household head, %	
Wages, %	22	Household head herself	8
Type of fuel used for cooking		Spouse	86
Wood, %	88	Parent	2
Straw/grass, %	78		
Dung cake, %	45		

Figure 3. Financial independence**Figure 4. Frequency of meeting or talking to maternal family members**

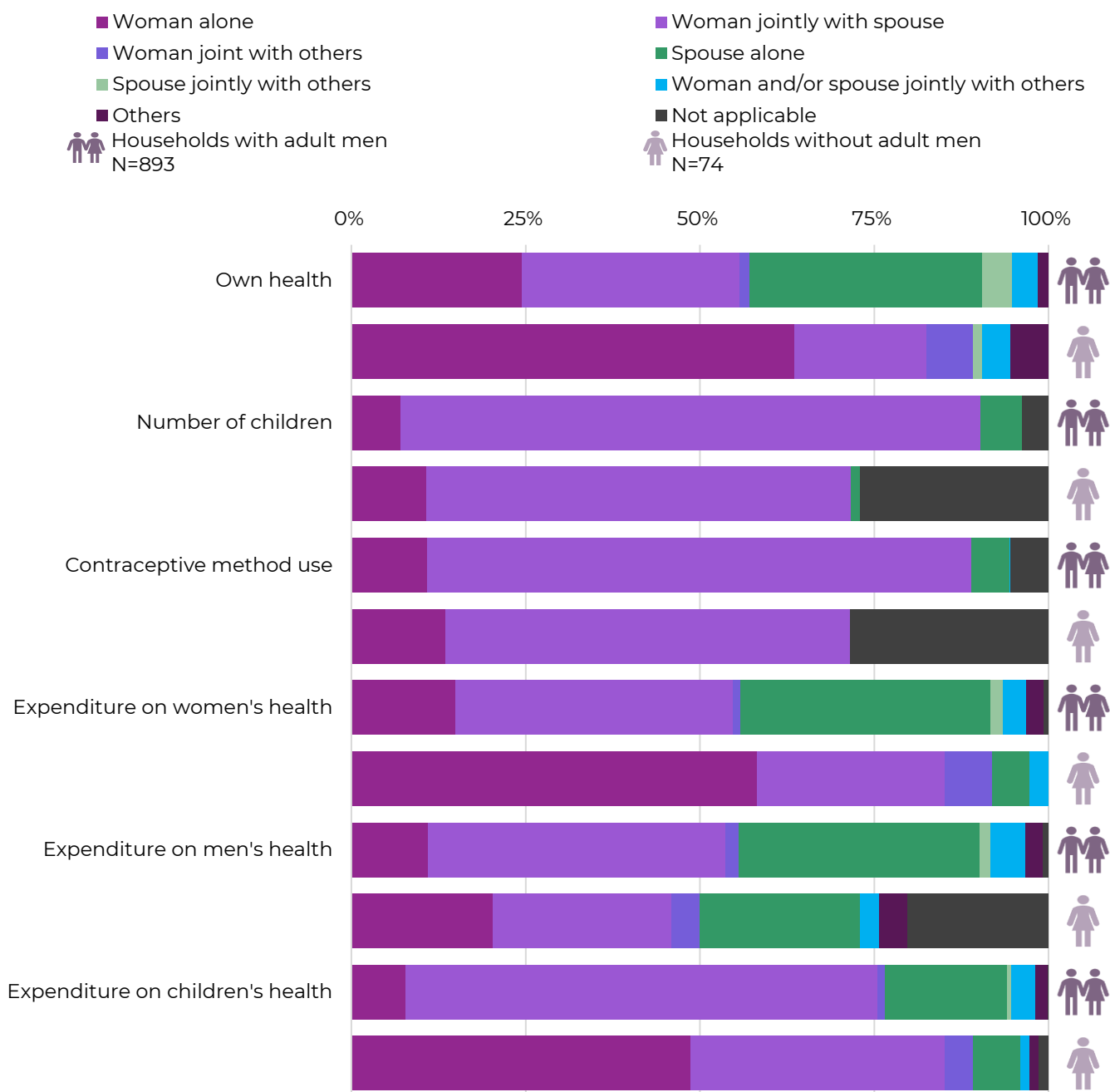
Notes: Figure 3 shows ownership of financial assets by respondents. They were asked direct questions about these assets that could be answered in yes or no. 'Have own money to use' denotes the percentage of respondents with personal funds, in any form, available for discretionary use. *167 women who answered yes to having own bank account were asked if they ever used it. Figure 4 shows the frequency of traveling outside of the home to meet maternal family members.

FINDINGS

- ✓ While most women have their own money to use, very few of the respondents have a bank account.
- ✓ Most respondent women visit their maternal several times a week.

Figure 5. Percent of decisions made by different household members in households with and without any adult men

Health & health expenditure



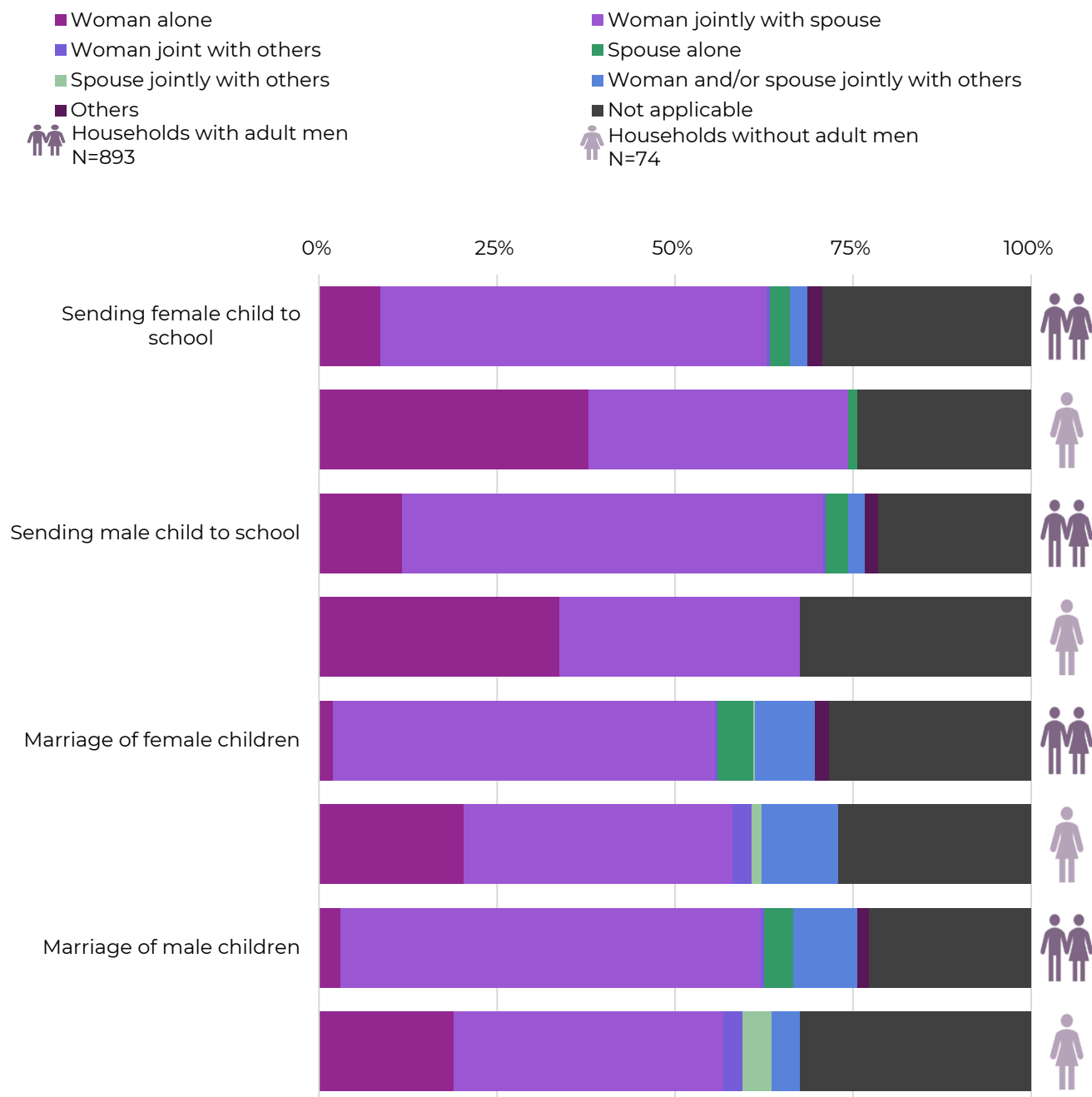
Note: This figure shows who in the household participates when decisions are being made about different health-related issues. 'Others' refers to household members other than spouse and/or non-household members.

FINDINGS

- ✓ Few women can make decisions alone. Most of them make decisions jointly with their spouse or other household members.
- ✓ Most women take decisions about their own health, expenditure on women's or child's health alone in households without adult men.

Figure 6. Percent of decisions made by different household members in households with and without any adult men

Child-related matters



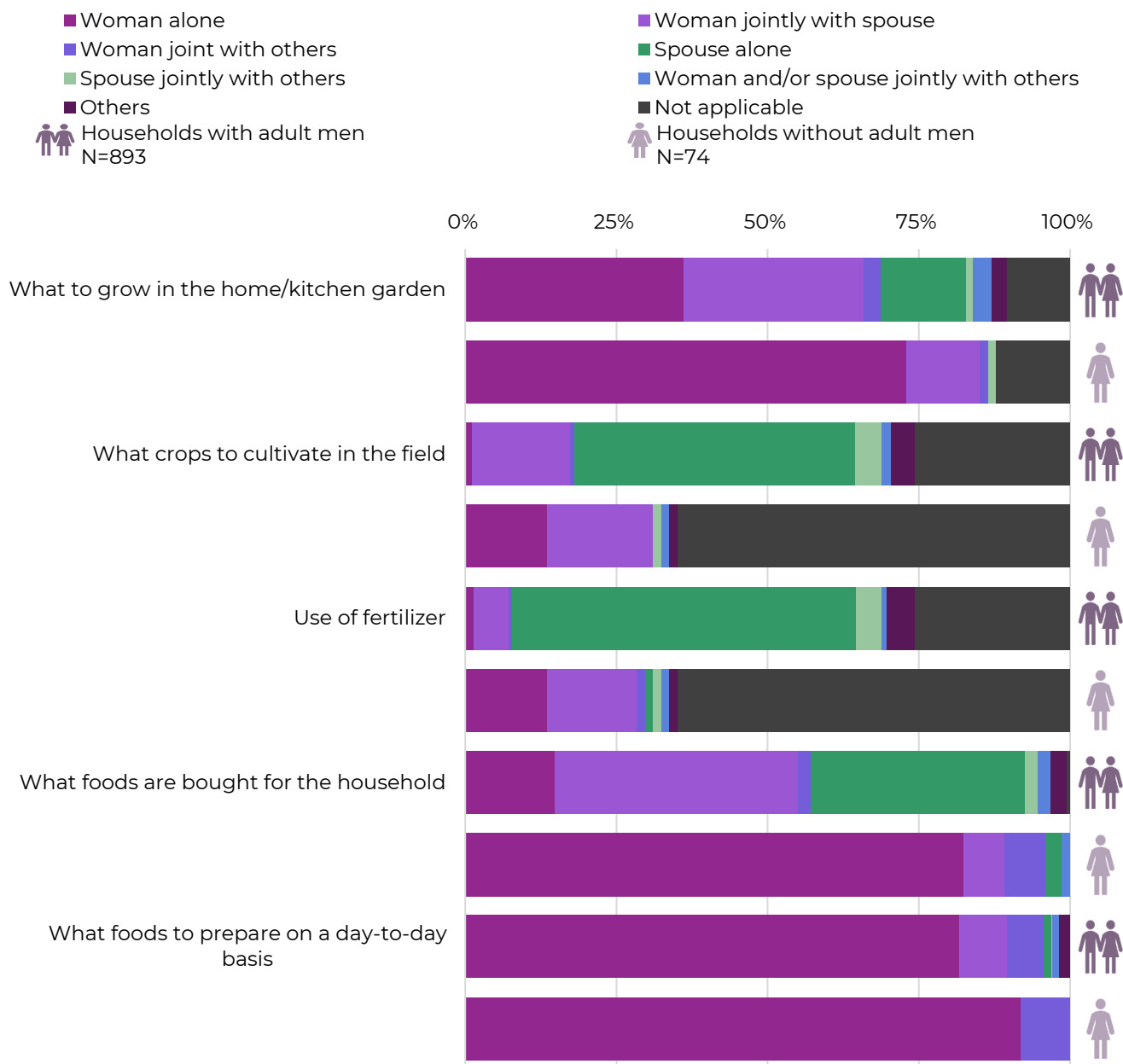
Note: This figure shows who in the household participates when decisions are being made about different child-related matters. 'Others' refers to household members other than spouse and/or non-household members.

FINDINGS

- ✓ Most women take decisions jointly with spouse in child-related matters.
- ✓ Very few women or spouses take decisions alone about marriage of male or female children.

Figure 7. Percent of decisions made by different household members in households with and without any adult men

Agriculture & food



Note: This figure shows who in the household participates when decisions are being made about different agriculture and food related issues. 'Others' refers to household members other than spouse and/or non-household members.

FINDINGS

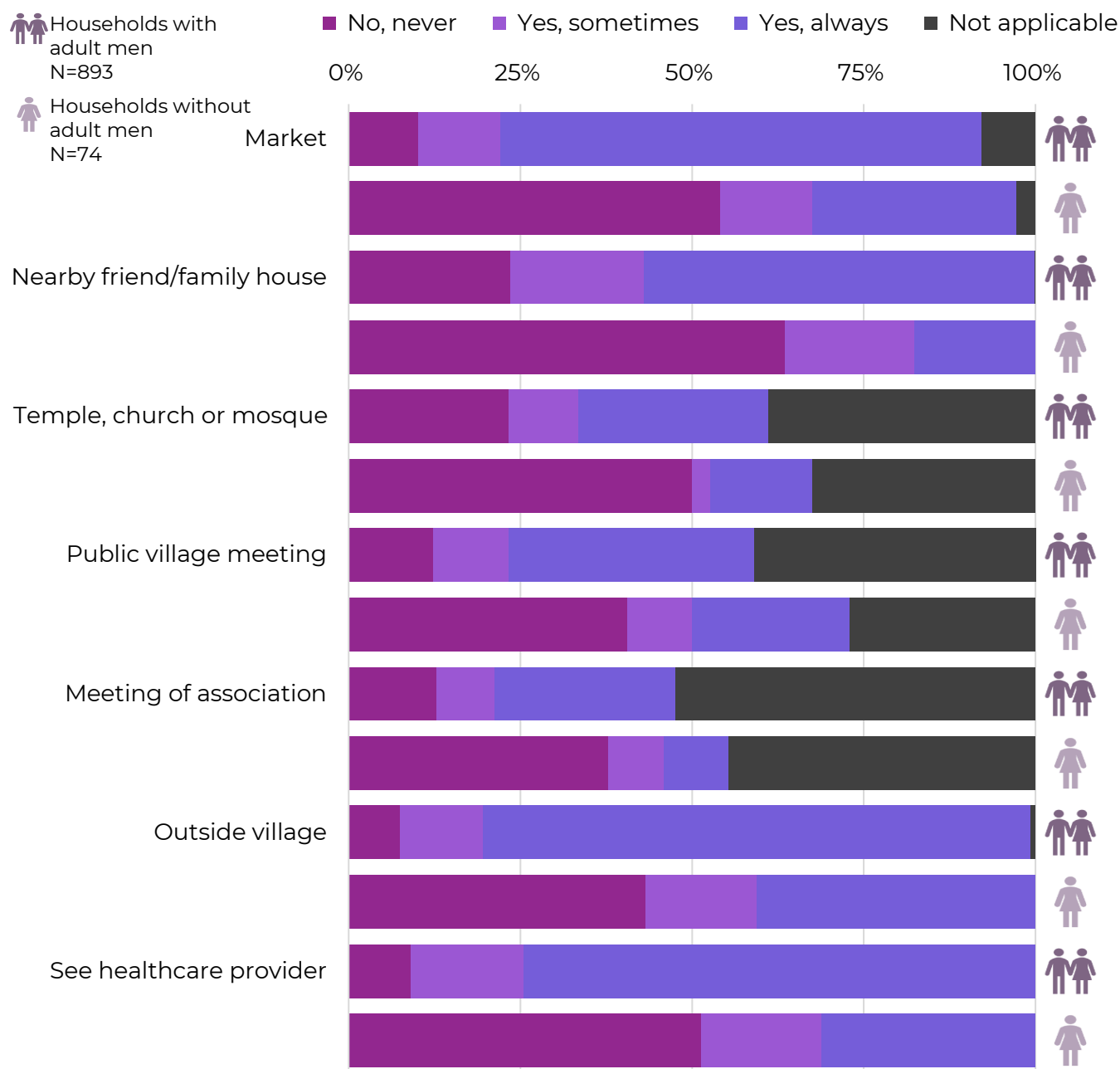
- ✓ Most crop related decisions are taken by spouses alone. Crop-related matters are not applicable to households without adult men.
- ✓ Most women decide what foods to prepare in both kind of households, with or without adult men.

Women's decision-making power

82% of women from households with adult male members decide alone what foods to prepare but only 15% of women in these households decide alone what foods to purchase



Figure 8. Respondent women needing permission from a household member to travel to various places in households with and without any adult men



Note: This figure shows the share of women who need to ask permission from a household member to travel outside of their houses to various places in and around the village. The respondents were presented with the option "not applicable" if they do not travel to a specific place that was asked about in the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

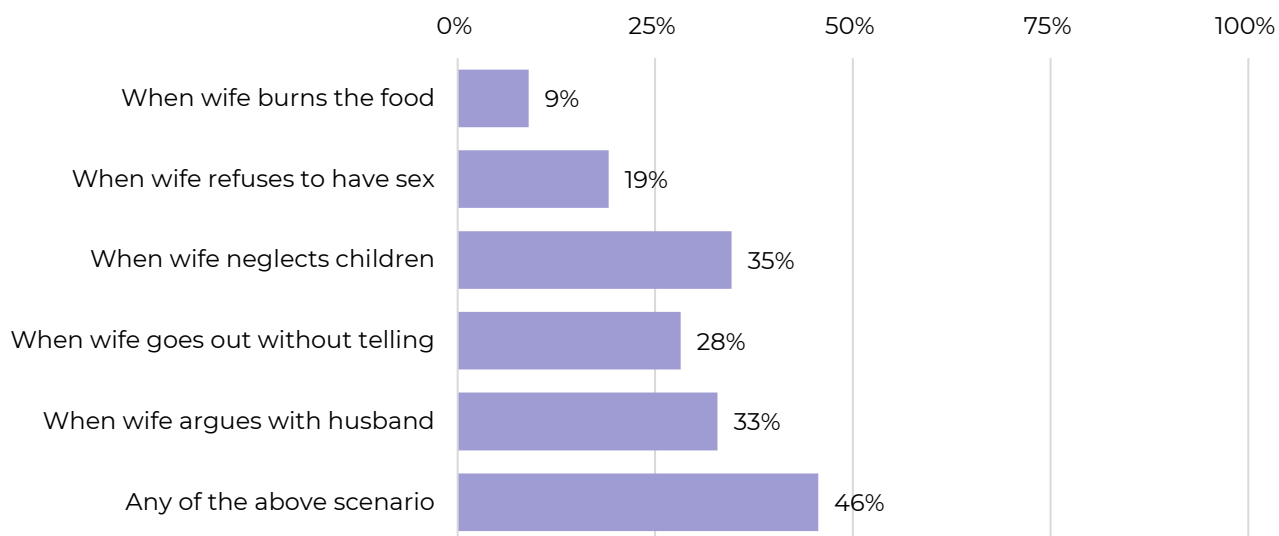
- ✓ Many women always need permission from a household member to travel to the market, nearby places, outside village or to seek a healthcare provider.
- ✓ Many women respondents mention that religious places, public village meeting or meeting of association is not applicable for them.

Women's physical autonomy

80% of women always need permission to travel outside the village in households with adult men, while 41% always need permission in households without adult men



Figure 9. Share of respondent women who agree that a husband is justified in hitting his wife in different scenarios



Note: This figure shows women's perceptions about a husband hitting his wife. Women respondents were presented with multiple common scenarios and asked if they think a husband is justified in hitting his wife in those scenarios. "Any of the above scenarios" refers to responding yes to any one of the scenarios presented. The sample includes all households with or without adult men.

FINDINGS

- ✓ Almost half of the women respondents justify a husband hitting his wife in one or more of the scenarios presented to them.



Photo credit: Abdul Momin

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Average years of education of adult women 20-71 years old with an adolescent residing in their household is 5 years.
2. Only 9% of women are a part of workforce, while 92% of women are engaged in unpaid household activities.
3. Financial inclusion is limited; while six in ten women have own money to use, only a minority possess a bank account in their name.
4. Decision-making agency of women is low, as women take most decisions jointly with their spouse or other household members. Women have the most say only in food preparation decisions.
5. Most women always require permission to travel outside their households.
6. Substantial proportion of women agree that a husband is justified in hitting his wife in at least one day-to-day scenario presented to them.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

1. What are the barriers to financial inclusion and how could financial independence be promoted among women?
2. What strategies can promote equal say for women in household decisions, especially concerning their own health?
3. What are the pathways to creating a safe environment for women to enable physical independence and mobility?

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Village and household sampling

We selected 25 villages in the district with a probability proportional to the number of households that reside in each village. Within each village, we conducted a household listing to identify eligible households, that is, those with adolescents (10-19 years old). From the households with adolescents, we randomly invited 20 households to participate in the survey. If a household refused, we replaced that household with another randomly selected eligible household, to retain a total of 1,000 households in the district. Thus, the findings reported in this data note are representative of rural households from this district that include an adolescent.

Respondent selection

Within households, one adult female aged 20+ years, one adult male aged 20+ years, and one adolescent aged 10-19 years were selected as the respondents for the survey. When multiple adolescents were living in a household, the oldest adolescent was selected. In some households, an adult male was not available (often due to migration for work). In such households, the female was the only adult respondent (see Table 1 for respondent sample sizes). At the beginning of the interview, the adult in the household primarily involved in agriculture (either male or female) and the adult primarily responsible for food purchasing (either male or female) were identified as the primary respondents.

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ABOUT TAFSSA

TAFSSA (*Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia*) is a CGIAR Regional Integrated Initiative that supports actions improving equitable access to sustainable healthy diets, that boosts farmers' livelihoods and resilience, and that conserves land, air, and water resources in a climate crisis.

ABOUT CGIAR

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