

Working women have more influence at home, study says

June 17 2014, by Francisca Antman

(Phys.org) —When women who are married work, they wield more decision-making power over large household expenses—like buying a car, large appliance or furniture—according to a University of Colorado Boulder study.

If a married woman has worked in the past 12 months, the likelihood of her involvement in decisions over major household purchases with her husband increases by about 5 percentage points, the study found. Also, the likelihood that her husband is the sole decision maker on big buys for the home drops by about 5 percentage points.

"I think it's so important because [employment](#) is the way that most women, by and large, are going to be able to improve their own situation," said study author Francisca Antman about the finding.

Antman, an assistant professor of economics at CU-Boulder, used data from a survey of families in Mexico for the study published in *Applied Economics Letters*. She believes the findings could have broader implications across ethnicities because of related research that shows a low level of disparity between cultures with regard to similar questions.

"Bringing more economic resources to the household by women can actually improve the weight that's given to their preferences within the household," said Antman.

Most previous studies in the field have explored what happens when

transfers of monetary resources are made to household members from outside parties such as governmental bodies, according to Antman. "But we want to know what happens when women are actually empowering themselves through employment," she said.

The Mexican Family Life Survey, used for the study, interviewed participating couples once in 2002 and again between 2005 and 2007. The survey results include 9,551 household observations.

The Mexican Family Life Survey is one of the first of its kind to ask about bargaining power—who actually makes household decisions—as opposed to simply exploring the differences between what females and males tend to do with allocated resources.

It also provides a valuable set of data because families were revisited and provided information on their fluctuating employment and unemployment circumstances. Responses over time thereby yielded insight into changes in decision-making power due to employment and despite any unobservable factors, such as a high regard for egalitarianism or respect for women.

Participating individuals self-identified as "head of household" or "spouse." Virtually all of the participating households—97 percent—were headed by men, according to the respondents.

About 67 percent of the households reported that the spouse—the female—was involved in decisions regarding large expenditures. About 31 percent reported that heads of households alone made the decisions.

In addition to answering questions about household roles, bargaining power and employment status, couples stated their education levels, ages and household sizes in the survey.

"Anytime we are making it easier for [women](#) to participate in employment activities, just as men do, we can also expect them to actually have greater influence within their households," said Antman. "And so it's not just a question of increasing their income, but actually increasing their influence over their own lives."

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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