Aspirations and Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan

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Research Question

Does having higher aspirations, or goals for the future, contribute to the **empowerment** of women?

- Attitudes (of both women and men) toward women's role in the family and society
- Women's involvement in household decision-making (as reported by a wife, and as reported by her husband)

Within a marriage, whose aspirations most strongly predict women's empowerment—those of the wife, or those of her husband?

Preview of the Results

After taking into account an individual's current standing (in the areas of income, assets, education, social status, and security) and controlling for a variety of covariates:

- Higher aspirations in these domains on the part of the husband predict more egalitarian gender attitudes for both the husband and his wife
- Higher aspirations on the part of the wife are NOT robustly associated with more egalitarian gender attitudes
- Higher aspirations on the part of the wife predict that her husband is significantly more likely to report that women are involved in household decision-making

Suggests that raising aspirations may be one route to empowering women

Motivation

- Having higher aspirations, or goals for the future, has been found to increase individuals' economic, political, and social investments in their futures—from investment in small businesses to voting and participating in civic organizations (e.g., Appadurai, 2004; Ray, 2006; Healy, Kosec, and Mo 2017; Genicot and Ray 2017)
- At a macro level, many studies document how women's empowerment can improve development outcomes (Diebolt and Perrin, 2013; Duflo, 2012)
  - Similar arguments apply at the household level, where greater investment in women's human capital and their participation in the labor force can increase household income and wealth
- We know of no literature examining how aspirations influence attitudes toward women and women's decision-making power in the household

Data

- Data source: The Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) Study, 2016
  - Longitudinal survey of households and individuals in Kyrgyzstan
  - 8,094 individuals (2,529 households) interviewed
  - Covers all seven Kyrgyz regions (oblasts) and two cities (Bishkek and Osh)
- Aspirations module:
  - Individuals age 18-55 were asked about their current achievements, and *desired* achievements in the areas of income (soms), asset wealth (soms), years of education for children, social status (on a 5-rung ladder), and security (on a 5-rung ladder)
  - 6,157 individuals completed this module
- Two samples:
  - Full sample
  - Married pair sub-sample

Econometric Specification

- We estimate:

$$E_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A_{ijk} + \beta_2 X_{jk} + \beta_3 Y_{ijk} + \beta_4 Z_{ijk} + \beta_5 G_{jk} + \epsilon_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

where

- i indexes individuals, j indexes households, and k indexes the oblast
- E_{ijk}: egalitarian gender view or women's decision-making power index
- A_{ijk}: an individual's aspiration index (based on *aspired* levels of income, assets, education, social status, and security)
- X_{ijk} (individual-level controls): age, age^2, gender, married dummy, education level, and dummies for being employed, living with parents, and living with parents-in-law
- Y_{jk} (HH-level controls): age, age^2, gender, married dummy, education level, ethnicity, # of adult males, # of adult females, HH size
- Z_{ijk}: *current* levels of the 5 dimensions of aspirations
- G_{jk} (geographic controls): oblast fixed effects and a rural dummy
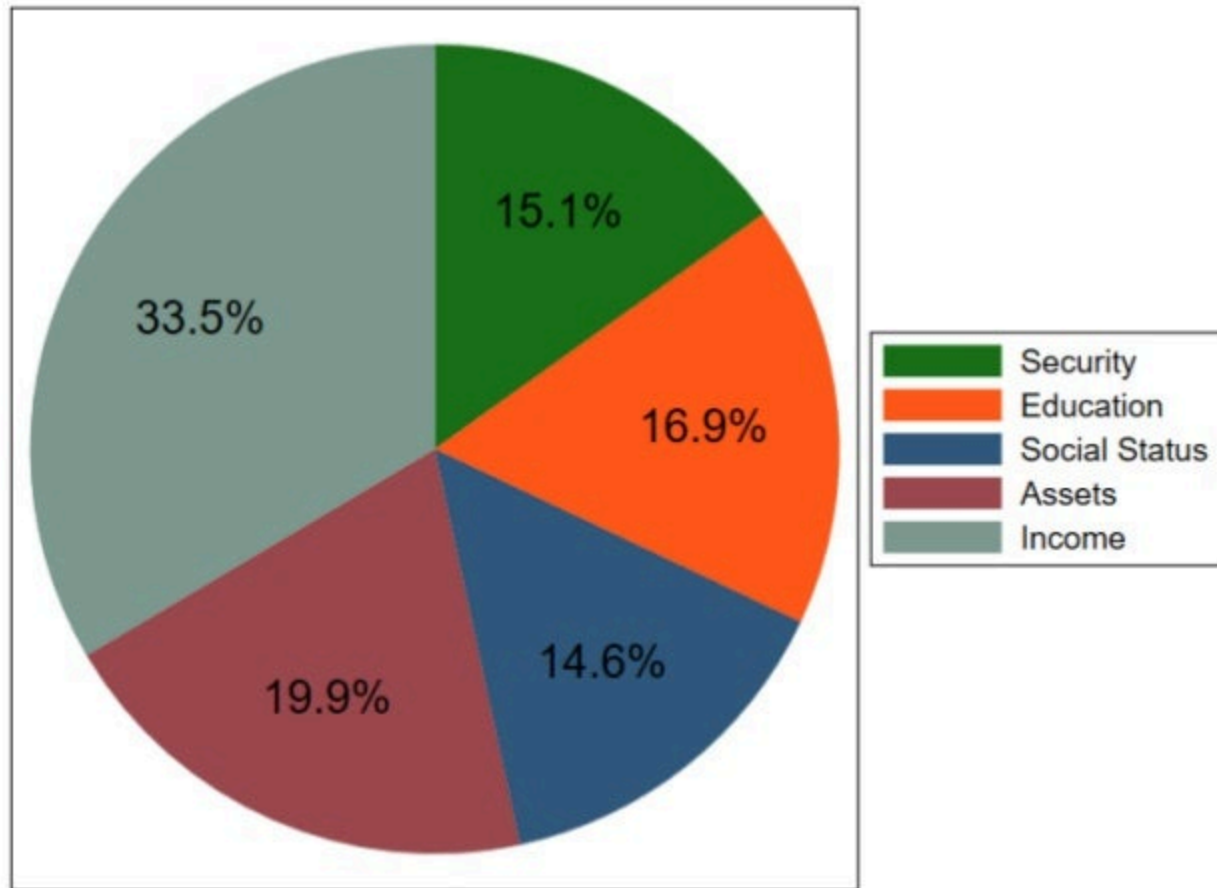
Aspiration Index Construction

- Respondents are asked what level they *would like to achieve* in:
  1. Household income
  2. Household assets
  3. Respondent level of social status
  4. Family member average level of education
  5. Respondent level of security

- We normalized each and summed them up, weighting according to the importance respondents said they placed on each. Formally:

$$aspiration\ index = \sum_{n=1}^{5} \left(\frac{a_n^i - \mu_n}{\sigma_n} \right) w_n^i \qquad (2)$$

- a_n^i: the aspiration of individual i on dimension n, μ_n, σ_n: the sample mean and S.D. of a_n^i; w_n^i the weight individual i puts on dimension n.

Aspiration Weights

- On average, over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the weights were assigned to income.

Outcome Index Construction

- When constructing the egalitarian gender views index and the women's decision-making power index based on N questions, we:
  1. Normalize answer to each question (subtract sample mean and divide by sample S.D.)
  2. Average across the full set of N questions
- Formally:

$$\text{outcome index} = \sum_{n=1}^{N} \left(\frac{v_n^i - \mu_n}{\sigma_n} \right) N^{-1} \tag{3}$$

- Here, v_n^i is the value of variable v for individual i on question n, and μ_n and σ_n are the sample mean and S.D. of v_n^i (respectively).

Gender Attitudes Questions for Construction of Egalitarian Gender Attitudes Index

1. Important decisions should be made by the husband rather than the wife.
2. A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.
3. A woman is really fulfilled only when she becomes a mother.
4. A working woman can establish just as warm and secure relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
5. A husband's career should be more important to the wife than her own.
6. A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.
7. Both the husband and the wife should contribute to the HH income.
8. Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.
9. Women should not work outside her home due to religious considerations.

Women's Decision-Making Questions (17) for Construction of Women's Decision-Making Index/ Sub-Indices

- Marital decisions
  - Marriage of male household members
  - Marriage of female household members
  - How much kalym to pay for bride
- Major economic decisions
  - Where male household member should work
  - Where female household member should work
  - Whether to buy major items (e.g. car, house)
  - Migration of a household member
  - Which production crop to cultivate
  - When and at what price to sell the harvest or livestock
- Financial management
  - Whether or not to lend money to others
  - How much to save of household income
  - How much money to give to relatives at weddings or funerals
  - Whether or not to borrow money from others
  - How to use remittances
  - Children's education and health
- Non-financial decisions
  - Negotiating with neighbors
  - Participation to discuss community issues

Table 1: The relationship between one's own aspirations and one's own women's empowerment index

	Egalitarian gender attitude index			Women's decision-making power index		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Controls added iteratively						
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual-level controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Household-level controls		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Current level of aspirations components			Yes			Yes
Aspiration index	0.113***	0.119***	0.148***	0.082**	0.077**	0.056
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.035)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.036)
R^2	0.150	0.166	0.169	0.347	0.377	0.388
N	5744	5744	5744	5739	5739	5739

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the soato (community) level. *** indicates $p<0.01$; ** indicates $p<0.05$; and * indicates $p<0.10$.

Table 2: The relationship between one's own aspirations and one's own women's empowerment index, by gender

	Egalitarian gender attitude index		Women's decision-making power index	
	Female (1)	Male (2)	Female (3)	Male (4)
One's own aspiration index	0.182***	0.116***	0.045	0.059
	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.045)
R^2	0.236	0.131	0.428	0.361
N	2919	2825	2913	2826

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the soato (community) level. *** indicates $p<0.01$; ** indicates $p<0.05$; and * indicates $p<0.10$. All regressions include our full set of controls.

Table 3: The relationship between own and spousal aspirations and one's own women's empowerment index in the sample of married pairs

	Egalitarian gender attitude index			Women's decision-making power index		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Wives						
Wife's own aspiration index	0.132**		0.074	0.069		0.027
	(0.051)		(0.047)	(0.046)		(0.048)
Husband's aspiration index		0.152***	0.116***		0.098*	0.085
		(0.045)	(0.040)		(0.050)	(0.054)
R^2	0.221	0.224	0.226	0.400	0.402	0.402
N	1758	1758	1758	1758	1758	1758
Panel B: Husbands						
Husband's own aspiration index	0.132***		0.104***	0.034		-0.014
	(0.042)		(0.038)	(0.048)		(0.052)
Wife's aspiration index		0.111**	0.059		0.094**	0.101**
		(0.046)	(0.041)		(0.044)	(0.049)
R^2	0.176	0.173	0.177	0.368	0.370	0.370
N	1757	1757	1757	1759	1759	1759

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the soato (community) level. *** indicates $p<0.01$; ** indicates $p<0.05$; and * indicates $p<0.10$. All regressions include our full set of controls.

Table 4: The relationship between aspirations and one's own women's empowerment subindices

	Marital decisions	Major economic decisions	Financial management decisions	Non-financial decisions
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Overall sample				
One's own aspiration index	0.014	0.070*	0.072*	0.040
	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.044)
R^2	0.346	0.292	0.385	0.253
N	4657	5720	5729	5695
Panel B: Married pair sub-sample, wives				
Wife's own aspiration index	-0.059	0.016	0.080	0.022
	(0.053)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.074)
Husband's aspiration index	0.129**	0.081	0.096	0.020
	(0.062)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.077)
R^2	0.399	0.307	0.389	0.222
N	1360	1756	1756	1749
Panel C: Married pair sub-sample, husbands				
Husband's own aspiration index	-0.035	0.004	-0.009	-0.056
	(0.062)	(0.059)	(0.065)	(0.083)
Wife's aspiration index	0.032	0.103*	0.107*	0.118*
	(0.081)	(0.059)	(0.054)	(0.070)
R^2	0.339	0.286	0.350	0.243
N	1388	1757	1758	1751

Table 5: The relationship between aspirations and one's own women's empowerment index, by income strata

	Egalitarian gender attitude index			Women's decision-making power index		
	Bottom tercile (1)	Middle tercile (2)	Top tercile (3)	Bottom tercile (4)	Middle tercile (5)	Top tercile (6)
Panel A: Overall sample						
One's own aspiration index	0.103**	0.158***	0.145***	0.127*	0.007	0.036
	(0.049)	(0.058)	(0.034)	(0.066)	(0.060)	(0.039)
R^2	0.269	0.202	0.137	0.409	0.400	0.419
N	1461	1928	2355	1454	1931	2354
Panel B: Married pair sub-sample, wives						
Wife's own aspiration index	0.019	0.096	0.083	0.101	0.025	-0.013
	(0.082)	(0.080)	(0.050)	(0.091)	(0.096)	(0.059)
Husband's aspiration index	0.128	0.185**	0.090**	0.076	0.055	0.116*
	(0.093)	(0.085)	(0.043)	(0.108)	(0.101)	(0.062)
R^2	0.414	0.303	0.204	0.482	0.428	0.432
N	460	586	712	459	586	713
Panel C: Married pair sub-sample, husbands						
Husband's own aspiration index	-0.090	0.233***	0.138***	-0.097	0.020	0.035
	(0.085)	(0.084)	(0.044)	(0.120)	(0.100)	(0.070)
Wife's aspiration index	0.085	0.042	0.053	0.180	0.100	0.027
	(0.058)	(0.084)	(0.050)	(0.109)	(0.085)	(0.064)
R^2	0.285	0.264	0.206	0.426	0.394	0.428
N	458	586	713	459	587	713

Table 6: The relationship between aspirations and one's own women's empowerment index, by type of marriage

	Egalitarian gender attitude index		Women's decision-making power index	
	Non-arranged (1)	arranged (2)	Non-arranged (3)	arranged (4)
Panel A: Married pair sub-sample, wives				
Wife's own aspiration index	0.026	0.108	0.069	-0.054
	(0.051)	(0.074)	(0.051)	(0.101)
Husband's aspiration index	0.084*	0.180***	0.060	0.121
	(0.047)	(0.060)	(0.054)	(0.086)
R^2	0.331	0.238	0.446	0.392
N	1009	755	1009	755
Panel B: Married pair sub-sample, husbands				
Husband's own aspiration index	0.084*	0.135**	-0.042	0.059
	(0.045)	(0.062)	(0.053)	(0.082)
Wife's aspiration index	0.008	0.114*	0.126**	0.081
	(0.049)	(0.061)	(0.057)	(0.080)
R^2	0.197	0.249	0.396	0.422
N	1009	754	1010	755

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the soato (community) level. *** indicates $p<0.01$; ** indicates $p<0.05$; and * indicates $p<0.10$. All regressions include our full set of controls.

Conclusion

After taking into account an individual's current standing (in the areas of income, assets, education, social status, and security) and controlling for a variety of covariates:

- Higher aspirations in these domains on the part of the husband predict more egalitarian gender attitudes for both the husband and his wife
- Higher aspirations on the part of the wife are NOT robustly associated with more egalitarian gender attitudes
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Suggests that raising aspirations may be one route to empowering women