

**This Just In... reports are a quick summary of new health marketing and communication research and trends. These brief “nuggets” spotlight new findings with communication practice implications for CDC and its public health partners.**

Brought to you by the Marketing and Communication Strategy Branch in the Division of Health Communication and Marketing, National Center for Health Marketing, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## We knew it was true:

### Women do call the shots at home, according to the results of a new study

**Research objective:** To explore decision making in the typical American home in four familiar areas of domestic life: (1) shared weekend activities such as shopping, going to the park, etc.; (2) household finances; (3) big home purchases; and (4) television viewing.

**Methods:** 1,260 married or partnered adults participated in this telephone survey. Only one partner was interviewed and his or her answer was accepted as an accurate characterization of that couple's decision making. For each question, respondents were asked if they or their partner generally has the final say in decision-making. They were not explicitly asked whether they generally share decisions—though this response was recorded if it was volunteered.

**Findings:** Researchers found that in 43% of the couples, men don't have the final say in any of the four areas tested. These men either share decision making with their partners or defer to them. There are significantly fewer couples (33%) in which the woman does not take the lead in any of the four areas. Also, more women (15%) than men (9%) are the lead decision makers in three or more areas. Older couples (those 65 and older) are twice as likely as younger couples (those younger than 30) to make decisions together in at least three of the four areas tested.

**Shared Weekend Activities**--Men were more likely to acknowledge their spouse/partner's lead role in choosing shared weekend activities. While 17 percent said the decider was mostly themselves, 26 percent said it's mostly my spouse/partner.

**Household finances**--The majority of men (37%) view themselves as the ones making final decisions on household finances, but their spouses/partners tend to see matters differently. In this vein, 45 percent of women see themselves wielding decisive power. Interestingly, only 23 percent of women said that their spouse/partner holds decision making power, whereas 30 percent of men said the same of their spouse/partner.

**Big purchase decisions**--About 46% of couples jointly make decisions about buying major items for the home. But in families in which one person makes most of these decisions, it's the woman and not the man who has the last word when purchasing big-ticket items for the home (30% vs. 19%).

**Television remote**--There's not much dispute over who controls the television remote. Women say they are about as likely to decide what to watch on television (26%) as their spouses (28%). Men are slightly more likely to say their spouse decides (30%) than say they control the remote (24%).

#### *Practice implications for health marketers and communication professionals*

The findings illustrate that while there are more women who take the lead in making family decisions; neither gender is the only decision maker in general. This suggests that for each decision domain, formative research should be conducted to determine how each gender contributes to the decision. Indeed, a recent survey indicates that women tend to be the primary decision maker regarding health matters of family members (Bailey, 2008). Given this information, health marketers and communication professionals should consider how a woman makes buying decisions for home items and think about ways these could be compatible with promoting healthy behaviors (e.g., eating better, using Green cleaning products, etc.). In addition, think about how to tie in health messages to shared weekend activities that women are most likely to decide for the couple, such as how to make walking an appealing and healthy weekend couple's activity. Because older couples are making more joint decisions, consider targeting both spouses in this age group with health prevention and promotion messages.

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