

The Effect of Women's Socio-demographic Variables on their Empowerment

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Abstract: Social scientists and development agencies have long been interested in the conditions that empower women. Since the empowerment could give women freedom of choice, equal access to domestic and community resources, opportunities and powers, thus, empowerment of women and the improvement of their status, particularly in respect of education, health and economic opportunities (occupation), are highly important ends in themselves. However, there are many factors which stop women benefiting from such development and contribute to women's powerlessness such as inequality in economic opportunity, lack of knowledge, skills, and lack of access to education. This study elucidates the relationship between socio-demographic variable of women and their empowerment in Shiraz, Iran. Indeed, this study discovered the effect of respondents' background i.e., age, education, occupation, family income and marital status on their empowerment. Data was collected from 195 women who participated in empowerment process which organized by NGOs in the whole city of Shiraz. The result of study showed that among the socio-demographic variables, only education and marital status had effect on empowerment. It can be concluded that access to education and knowledge play an important role increasing women empowerment. The result of study also showed that the divorced women have high level of empowerment compare to married and widow women. This is might due to that married women couldn't get their husband permission to participate in empowerment process. [Journal of American Science 2010;6(11):426-434]. (ISSN: 1545-1003).

Key words: empowerment, socio-demographic variables, women, Iran

Introduction

Empowerment is a central concept in the elaboration of an alternative vision of development. It encompasses both the process of emancipation, the shifts in power relations which begin to enable the oppressed to take control of their own futures, and the ultimate goal of an equitable and just society.

The concept of women's empowerment implicitly assumes that in all societies, men control women, particularly in their households and families levels (Smith 1989). As the evidence that gender equality is important for economic growth, poverty reduction and enhanced human well-being has grown

interest in the determinants and correlates of women's empowerment has also grown. This view of women's empowerment is part of a sociological or anthropological conception which recognizes that individuals belong to and are strongly influenced by social collectivities that are integrated by common ideological or normative systems. (Mason and Smith, 2003)

Empowerment, as suggested by Karl (1995), is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase self-reliance and to state their independent right to make choices and control resources. It is a participatory process of awareness

and capacity building that begins at the levels of home and community, reading to greater participation and decision-making power and control, and to transformative action enabling individuals or groups to change balances of power in social, economic and political relations in society.

This study was carried out to determine the impact of socio-demographic background of women and their empowerment. The current paper explores the empowerment of women based on their backgrounds i.e., age, educational attainment, occupation, marital status and family income.

Literature review

Empowerment as a concept has been much discussed for a number of years. According to Mc Whirter (1991), empowerment is a process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, and (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some control over their lives.

Similarly, Moser (1990) has defined women's empowerment as the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material and non material resources. In addition, Zimmerman & Rappaport (1988) have stated that empowerment is the ability of individuals to gain control socially, politically, economically, and psychologically through (1) access to information, knowledge, and skills; (2) decision making; and (3) individual self-efficacy, community participation, and perceived control.

This study which aims to find out a suitable model of empowerment focuses on the models of Rowlands (1997) and (Schulz, Israel, Zimmerman, & Checkoway, 1993). Rowland, in her study in Honduras, recognized three levels for empowerment: personal empowerment, close relationships, and collective empowerment. Personal empowerment refers to developing a sense of self individual confidence, capacity and undoing the effects of internalized oppression. Close relationships refers to the ability to negotiate and influence, the nature of one's relationships and the decisions made within them. Collective empowerment involves individuals working together to achieve a greater impact than they could have alone. The entire process involves some

degree of personal developmental and involves moving from insight to action.

On the other hand, Schulz, et al. (1993) have pointed out that empowerment has different levels of analysis and practice i.e., individual, organizational, and community. Individual or psychological empowerment refers to an individual's ability to make decisions and have control over his or her personal life. It is similar to other constructs such as self-efficacy and self-esteem in its emphasis on the development of a positive self-concept or personal competence.

Organizational empowerment is related to circumstances in which members share information and power, utilize cooperative decision-making process and are involved in the design, implementation, and control of efforts toward mutually defined goals. Consequently, they empower individuals as part of the organizational process. In community empowerment individuals and organizations apply their skills and resources in collective efforts to meet their respective needs. Through such participation, individuals and organizations within an empowered community provide enhanced support for each other, address conflicts within the community, and again increase influence and control over the quality of life in their community (Schulz et al., 1993).

This study constructs two components of empowerment, namely individual empowerment and community empowerment, relying mostly on Rowlands (1997) and Schulz, et al., (1993) as their work seems most relevant to the social structure of Iran.

Personal empowerment views empowerment as focused on individual strength and self-esteem to gain control over available resources and to exercise their right to obtain quality of life for themselves and their family (Moyle, Dollard, & Biswas, 2006). Individual empowerment includes the following elements: self-esteem, decision-making ability, and control over life situations (Rowlands, 1998).

Self-esteem: it refers to an individual's judgment of self-worth, which is derived from self-evaluations based on competence or on attributes that are culturally invested with a certain value (Bandura, 1997). Self-esteem can also facilitate the empowerment process because it relates to an individual's sense of value or worth (Blascovich &

Tomaka, 1991) and is 'a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self' (Rosemberg, 1965).

Decision- making ability: it refers to the ability of people to define their own goals, act upon them, and make choices through critical thinking (Kabeer, 1999). She emphasizes on decision-making and the ability to make choices when measuring empowerment. In other words, people are empowered when they can define their own goals and act upon them.

Control over life: it refers to influence over situations and whether one can produce desired events, or avoid others, through their actions (Bandura, 1997). Control is more about actual ability than perceived ability. Lack of control may arise from personal incapability or from the existing social structure. It is necessary that people have the means (i.e. knowledge) and the belief in their ability to utilize those means (efficacy) in order to exercise control over outcomes.

Community empowerment is one in which individuals apply their skills and resources in collective efforts to meet their respective needs. Through such participation, individuals provide enhanced support for each other, address conflicts within the community, and gain increased influence and control over the quality of life in their community (Schulz et al., 1993). As Rowlands (1997) pointed out, collective empowerment involves individuals working together to achieve a greater impact than they could have alone. Community empowerment includes some elements such as working together, participation in NGO's program and community awareness.

Working together refers to individuals who are interested in working with other people in different contexts to share their skills and knowledge. Participation in NGO programs relates to involvement in programs organized by NGOs to improve the community situation. Community awareness refers to awareness of women about their role and situation in the household, the community and society.

In terms of socio-demographic status, education considered as the key factor to increase women's empowerment by increasing their self-confidence and understanding of how to operate in the world (Cochran, 1970). According to Dighe (1998) education assists the women to think critically and to question their disempowerment. Therefore, education provides opportunities for women to begin the question about themselves and gradually develop self-

confidence and a positive self-image so that they begin to appreciate their own capacities and potentialities. More so, education is one of the most important means of empowering women and of giving knowledge, skills and the self-confidence necessary to be full partners in the developmental process (Vijayanthi, 2002).

However, based on the literature, it can be said that women's education not only influence women's empowerment but also eliminates gender inequality. In this perspective, Spiro (1983) and Cassidy and Warren (1996) argued that women who had a lower level of education tended to support traditional gender role and gender inequality. In contrast, women who have a higher level of education are more likely to support non-traditional gender ideology.

Many scholars such as Emin (1994) and Opeala (1996) argued that women's education, employment and income has a significant influence on their empowerment. In his study, Ackerly (1995) discussed that empowerment can be measured only through education level and knowledge. Further, Kishor (2000) has pointed out to education and employment as the measurement of empowerment. On the other hand, employment is argued to improve women's empowerment for similar reasons, i.e., because it gives women access to their own earnings or contributions to family income that in turn increase their understanding of money, right to participate in financial decisions, or financial independence (Mason and Smith, 2003).

Methodology

This study used quantitative approach in the inquiry process to understand and explain empowerment which could be investigated and measured objectively. As has been reported somewhere that, quantitative approach is more objective and independent from research biases (Punch, 2000) in comparison to qualitative approach . Survey research design, is a procedure in quantitative approach which help the researchers to administer a questionnaire in order to identify trends in the attitudes, opinion, behavior or characteristic of population (Creswell, 2005). In this study, since the empowerment as a major issue of the study is measurable and accountable with its elements, the survey technique using questionnaire was implemented.

In this study, to determine the sample of study, the G*power statistical analysis program developed by Erdfelder, Faul, and Buchner (1996) was used. This analysis is ideal in that low error probabilities of alpha and beta can be achieved for any specifications of effect size. The sample size of the major objective of the study was the test statistics of One-way ANOVA with four groups. In order to detect an effect size of .25 with alpha at .05 and power of .90, the number of respondents needed was 232. Unfortunately, however, the calculated sample sizes are usually much larger than what is considered manageable in behavioral research. Time and financial constraints prohibit the use of ideal sample sizes. Then, the 195 respondents were selected using the random sampling technique.

Measuring variables

As mentioned earlier, individual empowerment consisted of three indicators such as self-esteem, decision-making ability and control over life. To measure the individual empowerment, 32 items from three indicators were combined. Scores of the scale ranged from 32 to 160. Each of the items had response categories on a five-point likert scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The Cronbach's alpha value (Cronbach, 1951) of the scale was .832, suggesting that the scale had a very high degree of reliability or internal consistency.

The socio-economic variables in this study were age, educational attainment, occupation, marital status, and family income. The respondents' age classified into five categories between 17-60 years old. Educational attainment includes six levels i.e., illiterate, elementary, secondary, diploma, bachelor and postgraduate grade. Based on respondents' answer, their occupations summarized into four categories, i.e. government servants, housewife, laborer, and self-employed. The marital status was classified into three types i.e., married, divorced and widow. The measurement of family income was based on Iranian currency, where the respondents, were classified into three categories from 1000,000 to 8000,000 Rial.

Result of the study

Profile of respondents (socio-economic status)

This section starts with the description of the women background such as, age, education,

occupation, marital status, and family income. The findings are revealed in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio demographic of respondents (N=195)

Variables	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Age			35	8.1
17-25	16	8.2		
26-34	91	46.7		
35-43	56	28.7		
44-52	23	11.8		
53-60	9	4.6		
Education				
Illiterate	4	2.1		
Elementary	40	20.5		
Secondary	49	25.1		
Diploma	65	33.3		
Bachelor	33	16.9		
Postgraduate	4	2.1		
Occupation				
Government servant	22	11.3		
Housewife	137	70.3		
Laborer	11	5.6		
Self-employed	20	10.3		
Marital status				
Married	163	83.8		
Divorced	16	8.2		
Widow	16	8.2		
Family income				
100-333	108	55.4	344.71	154.81
334-566	71	36.4		
567-800	16	8.2		

The age of women participating in this study ranged between 22 and 60 years old with a mean age of $M=35$ and a standard deviation was $SD=8.1$. Based on the Table 1, most of the respondents (46.7%) were in the age range of 23 to 34 years old. About 28.7% of respondents were in the age range between 35-43 years old. Thus, the data revealed that most of the respondents were in the age range of 26-43 years old. This reflects that those women who involved in NGOs were in the middle age of marriage.

In terms of educational attainment, the findings indicated that most of the respondents (33.3%) had diploma degree, followed by secondary education (25.1%), and elementary education (20.5%), whereas 16.9% had bachelor degree. The data shows that the educational level of majority of the women (81%) was at the diploma and less, or in other words, they were at the low level of education.

As depicted in Table 1 majority of the women (70.3%) were housewives and about 11.3% were working and engaged in the government sectors. This followed by the self-employed (10.3%). Thus, most of the women who involved in NGOs were without job or housewives.

In terms of marital status, majority of women (83.8%) were married, 8.2% were divorced and 8.2% were widows. The family income in this study was classified between 1 million Rial (Iranian currency) and 12 million Rial. The mean score of family income was three million and forty four thousands Rial (3,440,000 around 300\$) and its standard deviation was $SD=154.81$. In terms of family income, based on self rated, most of the respondents (55.4%) reported their family is in the low level of income (below 1000,000 Rial), about 36.4% of the families were in middle level and only 8.2% reported high level income (above 6,700,000). This reveals that most of the respondents were at the low level of income and were poor women.

Effect of socio-demographic variables on empowerment

In order to examine the mean difference of women empowerment that might exist among the groups according to some personal and socio-economic characteristics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized. This statistical analysis was appropriate to answer the study objective in which examines the mean difference of empowerment among the respondents according to age, education attainment, occupation, family income, and marital status. The results obtained show that there was no significant differences in the means of women's empowerment among the socio-economic status variables except the marital status and educational attainment.

One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine the mean difference of women's empowerment based on age of respondents among four groups. The respondents were classified into four age groups, where the results are shown in Table 2. The result shows that there was no significant difference in the mean of empowerment for age of respondents among four groups, $F(3, 191)=.86, P=.46$. The eta-squared of .01 confirmed that the mean difference of women empowerment among the four groups was fairly small and insignificant. This is in line with Handy and Kassam's finding (2006) which noted there was no relationship between empowerment and age.

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of age of respondents and Scores

Age groups	n	Mean	SD	F	P	η^2
22-31 years	77	220.06	12.74	.86	.46	.01
32-41years	79	223.61	15.06			
42-51years	25	225.80	15.40			
52-60years	14	218.86	16.33			

The one-way ANOVA also was employed to investigate the impact of respondents' education on their empowerment. Respondents were divided into six groups according to their education backgrounds (illiterate, elementary, secondary, diploma, bachelor, and postgraduate). The results are shown in Table 3. The results of the ANOVA test indicated there was significance difference in the means of empowerment of respondents between six groups and educational attainment, $F(5, 189)=2.02, P=.05$. Based on Cohen (1988), criteria (.01=small effect, .06 moderate effect, and .14, large effect) the eta-squared of .06 indicated that the mean difference of women empowerment between groups were fairly moderate. Analysis of means showed that the postgraduate group with $M=234.25, SD=5.90$ has the high performance in empowerment compare to the other education groups.

Women's education considered as the key factor in women's empowerment. Ackerly (1995) and Kishor (2000) argued that empowerment can be measured directly through education level and knowledge. Cochran (1979) have noted emphasized on education as the key factor to increase women's empowerment by increasing their self-confidence and understanding of how to operate in the world. Further, Dighe (1998) discussed that education has the strength to enable women to think critically and to question their disempowerment. Therefore, education could provide opportunities for women to evaluate themselves, and gradually develop self-confidence and a positive self-image so that they begin to appreciate their own capacities and potentialities.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of educational attainment of women and its scores

Education groups	N	Mean	SD	F	P	η^2
Illiterate	4	210.75	8.26	2.02	.05	.06
Elementary	40	222.32	15.12			
Secondary	49	223.12	13.03			
Diploma	65	220.98	14.77			
Bachelor	33	227.36	14.10			
Postgraduate	4	234.25	5.90			

The respondents' occupation is another socio-economic variable in this study. ANOVA test was performed to assess the difference in the mean score of women's empowerment among four groups of occupations. From the statistical test, it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the means for respondents' occupation among four groups, $F(3, 186) = 2.24, P = .08$ as depicted in the Table 4. The eta-squared of .03 confirmed that the mean difference among the four groups were small and insignificant. This is may be due to the majority of women (70%) were unemployed or housewives. Employment can improve women's empowerment for some reasons i.e., because it gives women access to their own earnings or contributions to family income that in turn increase the women's power at household and community level (Cheston & Kuhn, 2002; Mason & Smith, 2003).

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of occupation and its Scores

Occupation groups	N	Mean	SD	F	P	η^2
Government servant	22	227.86	12.77	2.24	.08	.03
Housewife	137	221.82	14.39			
Self-employed	20	227.00	14.50			
Laborer	11	217.55	13.17			

To determine the impact of family income on women's empowerment, one-way ANOVA was applied. The result of ANOVA test as shown in Table 5 reveals that there was no significant difference in the mean of women's empowerment between four groups and family income, $F(2, 187) = .9, P = .40$. The eta-squared of .01 indicated that the mean difference among the groups was small and insignificant. Meanwhile, women's income and microfinance can impact on women's self-confidence, enhance individual abilities, effective participate in politics etc (Cheston & Khan, 2002), however, in this study there was no relationship between family income and empowerment. Two reasons here can be discussed. First, in this study only family income was measured, not women's income. Secondly, most of the women who involved in empowerment process were the poor and low class, thus, there was no significant different between their incomes.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of family income and its Scores

Groups	N	Mean	SD	F	P	η^2
1000000-3,330,000 rial	108	221.53	14.35	.90	.40	.01
3,340,000-5,660,000 rial	71	224.55	14.68			
5,670,000-8000,000 rial	16	225.31	11.84			

One-way ANOVA also was performed to investigate the difference in the mean score of women's empowerment on the marital status of respondents. The statistical test in Table 6 shows that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean of empowerment for marital status among three groups, $F(2, 192) = 5.07, p = .007$.

Table 6: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of marital status and its Scores

Groups	N	Mean	SD	F	P	η^2
Married	163	223.84	14.05	5.07	.007	.05
Divorced	16	224.44	14.09			
Widow	16	212.25	13.60			

In addition, since the numbers of cases not equal in groups, the post hoc comparison (Tukey test) were selected to evaluate pair wise differences among mean scores in women's empowerment. The result of the test shows that there was significant mean score difference between widow and married groups, and widow and divorced groups since $p < .05$ were reported for two groups. These comparative result suggested that the divorced groups had high level of performance ($M = 224.44, SD = 14.09$), it was followed by married groups ($M = 223.84, SD = 14.05$). Eta-squared indicated that the proportion of variability in women's empowerment due to the marital status is .05. Therefore, the eta-squared of .05 which consider according to Cohen (1988) guideline showed a moderate effect. This means that the effect size of the marital status as an independent variable on the women's empowerment is moderate. The findings are shown in Table 7.

Based on socio-cultural structure of Iran, women are constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values. Women, also need the permission from their husband to attend any program. Thus, for the divorced women, since they don't need the husband permission, they can easily involve in empowerment process. On the other hand, this type of divorced women was easily seeking new jobs and skills in order to raise and educate their children. Therefore, there was a probability that the empowerment level of these women was higher than the other groups (widow and married).

Table 7: Result of Post hoc comparison test for respondents by marital status

Dependent variable	(I)marital status	(J)marital status	Mean difference	Sig
Women's empowerment	Married	Divorced	-.59	.986
		Widow	11.59*	.005
	Divorced	Married	.59	.986
		Widow	12.18*	.039
	Widow	Married	-11.59*	.005
		Divorced	-12.18*	.039

Conclusion

The results of study reveal that some of the background of women such as educational attainment and marital status had the impact on their empowerment. Indeed, based on socio-economic status of respondents, those women who have higher education were more empowered compared to illiterate, primary and secondary educated women. It can be concluded that access to education and knowledge play an important role in increasing women empowerment. Furthermore, the result shows that divorced women have high level of empowerment compare to married and widow women. This indicates that married women should get their husband permission to participate in empowerment process. This might be due to the socio-cultural background of the country which is largely practicing traditional and conservative way of life, and male dominated social structure. However, the results did not show any significant differences for the other socio-demographic variables such as age, family income, and occupation. The study also indicates the importance impact of occupation on empowerment. The literature stated that occupation has positive intervention in empowerment. However, since most of the women (70.3%) were housewives, there was no relationship between women's occupation and their empowerment.

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