

Survey of Barriers to Rural Women Economic Empowerment in Iran

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Abstract

Women play an indispensable role in farming and in improving the quality of life in rural areas. Also rural women play a key role in agricultural sector production by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post harvest and food security activities in developing countries. In addition, for reaching development and progress goals of developing countries such as Iran, considering women rural ability promotion are vital. Also, the important role of women rural empowerment in promoting more agricultural productivity and development in rural areas is now widely recognized. The purpose of this study was identifying barriers to rural women economic empowerment. A descriptive–correlation survey approach was used in this study. The population consisted of women living in rural areas of Ardabil County. The questionnaire and interview were used for data collection in this study. The researcher developed the survey instrument. Validity of the instrument was established using a panel of experts. Reliability of the instrument for various questions varied from 0.83 to 0.86. Results showed that the most important barriers to rural women economic empowerment are: less skill of women, lack of men confidence to women, Sexuality, much busy to work at home, lack of employment opportunity to rural women, lack support of government from women entrepreneurship, lack of ability of talking in public. By factor analysis, factors for barriers to rural women economic empowerment were reduced to four main factors, named as individual-psychological, economic participation, infrastructure and social-institutional.

Keywords: Rural women, economic empowerment.

Introduction

The 20th century has witnessed the upsurge of women empowerment movement universally. (Rakesh, 2010). It is an undoubted fact that development of women has to go much ahead in globally and in the Iranian context. As matter of fact, out of the 13.7 billion poor in the world, three fourth are women and out of the 872 million illiterates in the world, two thirds are women besides, the number continues to increase every day. (Muraleedharan, 2005:p54)In accordance with conducted researches in developing countries, women play pivotal role in rural communities. In reality, women are a great human resource in all countries and the role of women in society is critical for development arguably, to empower women is to increase their control over the decisions that affect their lives both within and outside the household. (Heidari, 2010:pp136-170)

In the Islamic republic of Iran women represent 51 percent of the population, and those women's contributions to the national gross domestic product equal approximately 31 percent. Ignorance to the magnitude and importance of women's economic contributions has led to their exclusion from the benefits of economic development efforts. Moreover, women have very limited access to equal opportunity such as employment, credit, technical assistance, capital, education and

job satisfaction. (Eftekhari, 2006:pp1-20) Also rural women are a great human resource and their role in the society is vital for its progress. The involvement and engagement of women in the present day Information society on an equal footing with men would directly contribute to improving the livelihood of people, making it more sustainable and thereby promoting the social and economic advancement of societies. Although rural women in Iran form a major portion of the labor force, their participation is not considered vital in social decision-making processes due to their limited access to formal education. (Kalantari et al, 2010:pp107-124) Abundant field evidence shows that rural women empowerment play a critical role in the rural areas development. Gender equality and women's empowerment will have a large and positive impact on national, community, and household economies. It is also necessary to increase the well-being, self-confidence, and respect of women throughout their personal and social networks.

Empowerment of women in the context of knowledge societies is understood as building the ability and skills of women to gain insight of actions and issues in the external environment which influence them, and to build their capacity to get involved and voice their concerns in these external processes, to make informed decisions. It entails building up capacities of women to overcome social and institutional barriers and strengthening their participation in the economic and political processes for an overall improvement in the quality of their life. (Jain, 2010) In addition, Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. Its parameters are - building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building up group cohesion, and action; ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change; encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society; providing the wherewithal for economic independence (Saba, 2005)

Empowerment is understood as “. . . possessing the capacity to make effective choices; that is, to translate one's choices into desired actions and outcomes.” (Vendy, 2009) also empowerment is the vehicle which enables women to renegotiate their existence on an equitable basis (Banerjee: 1992). In addition, *Women's Economic Empowerment* is an ongoing outreach, process of interrelated and multidimensional and changes to power relations (Malhotra, et al: 2002) In addition, women economic empowerment seeks to ensure that people have the appropriate skills, capabilities and resources and access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods. (Allendorf, 2006) Also, Women economic Empowerment is necessary for rural women to improve their situation. In terms of gender and development, empowerment is perceived to be a progressive process rather than an end product. This process involves a transformation through which individual women and groups with little power gain the ability to make choices and decisions that affect the course of their lives (Cheston & Kuhn, 2002) In addition, Iranian planning had found a concrete space for women by accepting empowerment of women as the prime concern since the 5th plan onwards in the area of rural. Also, political, educational, economic and legal empowerment of rural women is accepted as the established objective of the government of Islamic republic of Iran. (Mohammadi, 2001, pp175-201)

In reality, from the ability of rural women for making their life and household and communities hasn't been used accurately (Arasti, 2007, pp93-120) therefore, researcher and theorists for deep understanding of rural women empowerment mechanism haven't done widespread and interrelated investigations. (World Bank, 2005) therefore, although rural women form a major portion of the labor force, their participation is not considered vital in social decision-making processes due to their limited access to formal education and lack their abilities.

There are multiple obstacles to the economic empowerment of women in Iran. For example, limited access to educational opportunities, lack of men confidence to women, Sexuality, much busy

to work at home, lack of employment opportunity to rural women, lack support of government from women entrepreneurship and ... (Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, 2006)

There are numerous studies on various relations between empowerment, women economic empowerment, economic empowerment barriers and the success of the empowerment women (Lahsaeizada, M and et al., Emadi, H, 2010, Shariari, A and et al, 2007., Shakori, A, 2010., White, C, 2010., Allendorf, K, 2007. Ali, W and et al 2010). Empowerment is among the most frequently applied variables in research that seeks to address the performance of women rural.

Rural Women empowerment is a critical component of regional development and fostering women empowerment is one of the principal measures to accelerate economic and social development. To promote empowerment we need to know the barriers that affect Women economic empowerment to overcome the barriers and promote new policies and measures to create new ventures.

Methods and Data Sources

The methodological approach of this study employed an analytical method (co relational study). The study population consists of women living in rural areas of Ardabil County. (n=200) by using proportionate stratified random sampling method.

On the basis of review of the literature, a questionnaire was developed to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire covered two areas: 1) demographic characteristics such as age, sex...2) The point of view of rural women about barriers factors of economy empowerment which were measured on a five-point likert scale which ranged from 1(very little) to 5 (very much).

Content and face validity of questionnaire were discussed in the panel discussion that experts from Ardabil County Agricultural Organization office and academic staff from Department of Agriculture and Extension Education. A pilot study was conducted with 15 members. Reliability of questionnaire was estimated by calculating Cronbach's Alpha. Reliability for the overall instrument was estimated at 0.83.

Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS13). Appropriate statistical procedures for description (frequencies, percent, means, and standard deviations) and inference (factor analysis) were used.

Results

Personal characteristics of respondents

Data were collected from the heterogeneous respondents to seek the complete and get the factual results. The mean age of respondents was 33.62 years. 32.5 of them were lower than 20 percent, 18 of them were ranged from 21 to 30 percent, 20.5 of them were ranged from 31 to 40 percent and 29 of them were more than the 41 percent. 83.5% of them were married, 13.5% of them were Household protector and 6% were single. Majority of the respondents were uneducated (39%) and 1% percent of respondents were diploma and higher education. The demographic data collected from the subjects of this study is summarized in Table 1.

Barriers to women economic empowerment in rural regions

Based on the results literature review, barriers to women economic empowerment in rural areas of Iran were measured using five-point likert scale. The result is shown in Table 2.

As shown in table 2 results showed that the most important barriers to women economic empowerment are: less skill of women, lack of men confidence to women, sexuality, much busy to work at home and less literacy.

Table 1. Women individual Characteristics

Individual Characteristics	frequency	percentage
Age group		
<20	65	32.5
21-30	36	18
31-40	41	20.5
>41	58	29
Marital status		
Single	6	3
married	167	83.5
Household protector	27	13.5
family number		
0-3	50	25
4-6	104	52
7-9	33	16.5
>10	11	5.5
Education		
Uneducated	78	39
Reading and writing	15	7.5
Primary	54	27
Secondary	35	17.5
Public education	16	8
Diploma and higher education	2	1

Table2. Barriers to women economic empowerment in rural regions of Ardabil County

Barriers to women economic empowerment	Mean	SD
less skill of women	4.26	1.22
lack of men confidence to women	4.22	1.02
sexuality	4.02	1.31
much busy to work at home	3.96	1.27
less literacy	3.87	1.48
lack of ability of talking in public	3.84	1.18
lack of employment opportunity to rural women	3.80	1.29
lack support of government from entrepreneurship women	3.72	1.38
living in rural areas	3.67	1.20
lack of confidence of women together	3.64	1.52
lack of motivation to economic activates accomplishment	3.57	1.40
lack of acceptance of responsibility by women	3.56	1.53
powerlessness	3.45	1.34
much busy to work out of home	3.38	1.31
less self-confidence of women	3.36	1.47
inaccessibility of production sale market	3.35	1.41
inaccessibility of suitable road between rural and urban	3.15	1.36
former unsuccessful experience	2.99	1.51
lack of need of family to women income	2.88	1.61

Scale1) Very little; 2) little; 3) somewhat; 4) Much; 5) Very much

Factor analysis

Before conducting factor extraction, we applied the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity (BTS) to ensure that the characteristics of our data set were suitable for factor analysis. KMO analysis yielded an index of 0.746 and BTS 1.647, $p < 0.000$.

According to Kaiser's criterion, the only important components are those that have an eigenvalues of 1 or more. The following table explains this procedure.

To decide how many variables meet Kaiser's criterion, it is necessary to search in the total variance shown in Table 3. The total variance explained the eigenvalues associated with each factor (linear components) before extraction, after extraction and after rotation. Before extractions there are 19 components which are all variables listed. Under the Extraction Sum of Square Loadings only factor with eigenvalues bigger than 1 is listed, the result is only 4 factors. In the last part of the table the eigenvalues of the factor after rotation are displayed. Rotation of the factor axis has an effect which is optimizing the factor structure. These four factors explain a total 57.92% of the overall variance after rotation (Cumulative % column after rotation).

Table 3. Total Variance Explained before and after rotation

Component	initial Eigenvalues Loading		Extraction Sums of Squared loadings				Rotation Sums Squared		
	Total Variance	% of Cumulative %	Total Variance	% of Cumulative %	Total Variance	% of Cumulative %	Total Variance	% of Cumulative %	
1	5.562	29.276	5.562	29.276	4.249	22.365	4.249	22.365	
2	2.059	10.839	2.059	40.115	2.716	14.293	2.716	36.658	
3	1.778	9.357	1.778	49.472	2.128	11.198	2.128	47.856	
4	1.606	8.451	1.606	57.923	1.913	10.067	1.913	57.923	
5	1.375	7.238		65.161					
6	1.039	5.466		70.627					
7	.874	4.603		75.229					
8	.743	3.908		79.138					
9	.607	3.192		82.330					
10	.551	2.901		85.231					
11	.487	2.562		87.793					
12	.426	2.241		90.034					
13	.383	2.014		92.048					
14	.341	1.797		93.844					
15	.317	1.668		95.513					
16	.267	1.408		96.920					
17	.236	1.241		98.161					
18	.203	1.066		99.227					
19	.147	.773		100.00					

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Each factor was labeled to describe items that loaded on it and the number of items for each factor ranged from three to six. Table 4 summarizes the factors, eigenvalues, percentage of variance and cumulative variance for each factor. The factor loadings ranged from 0.642 to 0.817 and the eigenvalues ranged from 1.913 to 4.249. Factor1: Individual-Psychological explained 22.36 % of the

variance, factor2: Economic Participation explained 14.29 %, factor3: Infrastructure explained 11.19 %, and factor 4: Social-institutional explained 10.06 %.

Table 4. Factors, eigen values and percentage variance

Factors variance	Eigen values	Percentage variance	Cumulative
Individual-Psychological	4.249	22.365	22.365
Economic Participation	2.716	14.293	36.658
Infrastructure	2.128	11.198	47.856
Social-institutional	1.913	10.067	57.923

Conclusions

This paper studies the barrier to rural women economic empowerment of Ardabil County, Iran. According results of this study; education plays an important role in rural women economic empowerment. It seems that the existing programs in promotion of rural women economic abilities of Iran has not been successful. The findings suggest a formal and non-formal education and training to build the economic capabilities of women in rural areas and eliminate gender stereotyping. Therefore, it should be noted that education as a catalyst for promoting skill, knowledge and attitude to promotion of rural women economic abilities and capabilities that will enable rural women to be effective in life and work, providing them with appropriate job opportunities, enhancing women's participation in the decision-making process at both macro and micro level, political participation , economic participation and power over economic resources including being able to deal with the paradoxes and conflict generated by chance equal opportunities for women as well as the empowerment of rural women through providing them with appropriate job opportunities.

It should act create rural empowered women by motivating and developing the right empowerment direction. To promote need for self-determination, need for self-competency, self-meaning, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-management, competency, required skills, knowledge , attitudes, consciousness enhancement and gaining access to resources as the key elements of women empowerment should be provided to the rural women . Based on results of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- To emphasize on the education in order to promotion of women literacy and cognition about their abilities and needs at the end women action in term of that.
- To emphasize on the education in order to more using of knowledge, skill, attitude regarding their life quality ways amelioration such as health care, nutrition, family planning and etc
- To emphasize more on the education about of local projects implementation, cooperatives establishment and local institutions by rural women
- To facilitating more on the rural women membership in the productive cooperatives and the Islamic councils
- Supporting extensional plans in order to rising of rural women social awareness and knowledge and skill related to with different economic activities
- To emphasis more on the extensional programmes in order to recognition of needs, priorities, obstacles and opportunities that are declared by women
- Mobilizing resources, including at the national level and through official development assistance, for increasing women's access to existing savings and credit schemes, as

well as targeted programmes that provide women with capital, knowledge and tools that enhance their economic Capacities;

- Supporting remunerative non-agricultural employment of rural women, improving working conditions and increasing access to productive resources.

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