Factors Influencing Self-Efficiency of Rural Women in Malard County

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Abstract

The main purpose of this descriptive-correlational research was to determine the factors underpinning rural women's self-efficiency in Malard County, Iran. The statistical population consisted of all rural women in Malard County (N=23636). The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (n=613) and they were selected by the stratified random sampling method. Data for the study were gathered with a structured questionnaire whose content validity was determined based on inputs by experts in the field and a review of the relevant literature. Cronbach's alpha test was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. The data analysis was performed using SPSS v.18. The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a positive and significant correlation of educational and extension factors, participation in family decision-making, social factors, spatial dynamics, economic factors, self-esteem factors, and the capacity to deal with shocks and stresses with self-efficiency of rural women. There was also a negative and significant relationship between age and self-efficiency of rural women. The stepwise multiple regression analysis showed that economic factor (R^2=0.437), educational and extension factor (R^2=0.507), self-esteem factor (R^2=0.539), and social factor (R^2=0.545) were the most important factors contributing to the dependent variable (rural women self-efficiency), respectively.

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INTRODUCTION

Human capital has a significant role to play in the development of any nation. Women, as half of the population of each country, have a significant contribution to development (Kulkarni, 2011). Obviously, without the participation of rural women, the development of rural areas and the health promotion of rural communities will not be realized. In fact, if rural women do not participate in rural social life, the goals of sustainable rural development cannot be achieved. So, context should be provided for their participation. Therefore, the empowerment of rural women should be prioritized to implement the main strategies of economic and social development (Habibi and Zandieh, 2011).

The concept of self-efficiency was introduced into the history of psychology by Bandura in 1977. From Bandura's point of view, self-efficiency is the ability of an individual to perform a particular action in dealing with a particular situation. In other words, self-efficiency refers to the personal judgments of one's capability to accomplish the designed performance levels (Pajares, 1997). Women's self-efficiency is defined as more access of women to resources and more control over their lives, which makes them feel more independence and self-confidence, and this process increases their self-esteem (Ugbomeh, 2011).

Malhotra et al. (2014) conducted a research on measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development. The results showed that economic factors (including earning or increasing income, ability to repay loans, etc.), social factors (including women's freedom to participate in social activities), family factors (including decision-making power on family affairs), political factors (including participation in elections and political events), legal factors (including awareness of citizenship rights), and psychological factors (including self-esteem) played a significant role in their self-efficiency. In a research study entitled "Self-efficiency of women through the rise of new communica-

tion", UNESCO (2014) concluded that the promotion of education, health, knowledge, and skills of women would play a significant role in their self-efficiency. Hosein (2013) addressed the self-efficiency of women through empowerment and revealed that motivation and resources were the main challenges facing the empowerment of women in developing countries, such as Indonesia. In his research on measuring the capacity of women in Bangladesh villages, Mahmud et al. (2012) identified five factors affecting the self-efficiency of women, including self-esteem, participation in family decision-making, women's freedom in spatial mobility and social life, and control of resources. Abu al-Fattahzadeh et al. (2017) assessed the factors influencing the self-efficiency of rural women in Isfahan. The results show that educational level, employment status, the use of mass media, social and occupational relations, personal income, mental and physical health, the level of government support, belief in gender equality, and the availability of credit funds have a positive and significant effect on women's self-efficiency. Also, Qanbari and Ansari (2015) identified the socio-economic factors affecting the self-efficiency of rural women in Rostam County in Iran. Their findings revealed that women's participation in economic activities, personal and social factors, lack of job opportunities, educational level, the lack of communication networks, the existence of family bias, and the lack of legal protections were the most important factors affecting the self-efficiency of rural women.

At the global level, the UN Development Program (UNDP) has promoted gender equality and women's self-efficiency on a wider scale as one of the key objectives of the Third Millennium Declaration. Consequently, the self-efficiency of women and their participation in various life domains has been considered in Iran as one of the important indicators of success in fighting against poverty (Shakouri et al., 2010).

However, due to different cultural, social,

and economic reasons, there is not an acceptable balance in the fair participation of men and women in rural development. Women's participation in various aspects of development is faced with some challenges due to some structural bottlenecks in rural areas (Shaditalab, 1993). According to the available statistics, rural women participate in the processing industries (50 %), crops and livestock (22 %), handicrafts (75 %) and planting (25 %), harvesting (24 5), livestock grazing (23 5), husbandry (42 %), and poultry farming (100 %) in the countryside. Therefore, their role in achieving food security is undeniable. But, their decisive role in society and rural development process is not so obvious in most developing countries. In rural communities of Iran, about 80 percent of women work, but they are considered as unpaid family labor (Iran Statistics Center, 2014).

Presently, 14,028 rural women live in Malard County, and they are potentially qualified for getting a loan for home-based businesses from the Organization of Agriculture, but they are not involved in the process of rural development due to numerous barriers, one of which is the lack of self-efficiency in rural women. According to the literature reviewed, the individual characteristics of rural women, extension and educational factor, social and cultural factors, economic factor, self-esteem of rural women, participation in family decision making, access to financial and social resources, freedom in spatial mobility and social life, and capacity to deal with shocks and stresses affect rural women's self-efficiency. So, this study aimed to examine the factors affecting the self-efficiency of rural women in Malard County from the perspective of rural women.

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the factors affecting the self-efficiency of rural women in Malard County of Alborz Province, Iran. In order to achieve this general purpose, the following specific objectives were set for the research:
- Describing the individual characteristics of rural women (gender, age, marital status, educational level, and work experience).
- Assessing the self-efficiency of rural women in Malard County.
- Evaluating the factors influencing the rural women's self-efficiency

Investigating the correlation between independent variables of research and self-efficiency of rural women.

METHODOLOGY

Malard County was selected as the research area. It is composed of seven districts including Bidghaneh, Khoshnam, Nam Abad, Akhtarabad, Shahid Fahmideh (Gheshlagh and Qayjagh units), Safadasht, and Amirabad Navabakhshi with 38 villages. This research was based on numerical analysis of data to explain the reasons for changes in social phenomena in a quantitative design. It is applied research in terms of purpose. Regarding the data collection method, the level of monitoring, and the degree of control on the variables, it is a non-experimental research type. In terms of data analysis, it is a correlation study carried out using a survey methodology and a questionnaire.

Data were collected in 2016-2017. The statistical population of the research included 23,636 rural women living in 38 villages of Malard County of whom 613 people were selected based on Cochran's formula. A proportional stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample population. Five faculty members of a university, the Department of Agricultural Extension and Education, and two experts of Management of Jihad-e-Keshavarzi of Malard County evaluated the face and content validity of the questionnaire as well. These evaluations led to some minor changes in the questionnaire. A pilot test was done in Ozoon Dareh village, Qazvin Province. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient ranged from 0.73 to 0.92.

The independent variables of the research were the extension-educational factor, equal participation in life decisions, social factor,

freedom in spatial mobility and social life, economic factor, self-esteem factor, coping with shocks and stresses, and individual characteristics of rural women (including age, educational level, and employment status). The dependent variable of the research was the level of self-efficiency of rural women which was evaluated with six items (evaluating the ability to solve difficult problems when trying adequately, struggling to accomplish something difficult and focus on progress instead of feeling discouraged, easy to achieve goals, having an initiative in an unpredictable way, maintaining calmness when faced with problems, and finding various solutions when faced with a problem).

Frequency, maximum, minimum, mode, median, mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive statistics of the variables with a normal distribution. The Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used for inferential statistics using the SPSS18 software package.

RESULTS

The findings revealed that the average age of the respondents was 37 years (SD=10.02). The minimum age was 22 and the maximum was 59 years. Most of the respondents (86.3%) were married. The educational level of the majority of the respondents (26.1%) was diploma and only 8 percent had a bachelor's degree. In terms of employment status, more than half of the respondents were housewives (69.98%) and about one-third

(30.02%) were employed.

To assess the self-efficiency of rural women, all six items (evaluating the ability to solve difficult problems when trying adequately, finding an effort to obtain a request if there are any objections, easy to achieve goals, having an initiative in an unpredictable way, maintaining calmness when faced with problems, and finding various solutions when faced with a problem) were combined and recoded to range from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Then, the scores were calculated for each participant and ranged overall from 6 (6×1) to 30 (6×5), representing the lowest and highest scores, respectively. Respondents with a score of 6-11 were classified as very low, 12-16 as low, 17-21 as moderate, 22-26 as high, and 27-30 as very high. The results of the study indicated that the overall level of self-efficiency was moderate among the respondents with a mean of 3.25 (Table 1).

The Pearson correlation results showed positive, significant relationships of self-efficiency with educational level, educational-extension factors, participation in family decision-making, social factors, dynamics and spatial dynamics, economic factors, self-esteem factors, shock absorption capacity, and stress ($p<0.01$). However, there was a negative, significant relationship between self-efficiency and age ($p<0.05$) (Table 2). Also, the Kruskal-Wallis test results showed that there were positive, significant differences between self-efficiency and educational level.

Stepwise regression analysis was used to

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Rural Women's Self-Efficacy (N=613)

Situation	Frequency	Frequency percentage (%)	Cumulative percent
Very low (6-11)	24	3.9	3.9
Low (12-16)	137	22.3	26.3
Moderate (17-21)	196	32	58.3
High (22-26)	184	30	88.3
Very high (27-30)	72	11.7	100

Mean: 3.25   Standard deviation: 1.05

Table 2

Relationship between Research Variables and Self-Efficacy of Rural Women (N = 613)

Independent variable	r_s	*p*-value
Age	-0.084*	0.037
Educational level	0.279**	0.000
Educational-extensional factor	0.594**	0.000
Participation in life decision making	0.393**	0.000
Social factor	0.543**	0.000
Freedom in spatial mobility and social life	0.573**	0.000
Economic factor	0.661**	0.000
Self-esteem factor	0.546**	0.000
Factor of coping with shock and stress	0.557**	0.000

** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

explain the variation of rural women's self-efficiency (dependent variable). The results showed that the economic factor was the strongest influential factor ($\beta=0.352$, $p<0.01$), followed by the extension-educational factor ($\beta=0.251$, $p<0.01$) and rural women's self-esteem ($\beta=0.238$, $p<0.01$). The economic factor alone accounted for 44% of the variance in the dependent variable (self-efficiency of rural women). Therefore, in total, these variables captured 54 percent ($R^2=0.546$) of the variance in rural women's self-efficiency. Participation in life decision-making, freedom in spatial mobility and social life, coping with shock and stress are variables which excluded in regression equation modelling.

Educational-extensional factor, participation in life decision-making, social factor, freedom in spatial mobility and social life, economic factor, self-esteem, and coping with shocks and stresses were included as the predictor (or independent) variables in regression analysis. Economic factor, extension-educational factor, self-esteem and social factor were positively related to self-efficiency of the respondents. The results showed that economic factor was the most influential ($\beta=0.352$, $p<0.01$), followed by extension-educational factor ($\beta=0.251$, $p<0.01$) and rural women's self-esteem ($\beta=0.238$, $p<0.01$). Economic factor alone accounted for

44 percent of the variance in the dependent variable (self-efficiency of rural women).

In the second step, by adding the educational-extension factors in the regression equation, the coefficient of determination reached 0.507. Also, in the third step, self-esteem was included in the regression equation and the coefficient of determination reached 0.539. In the fourth step, the social factors were included in the equation and the coefficient of determination amounted to 0.543. Therefore, in total, these variables captured 54% ($R^2=0.546$) of the variance in rural women's self- efficiency.

Participation in life decision-making, freedom in spatial mobility and social life, and coping with shocks and stresses did not significantly influence rural women's self- efficiency. The results of the multiple stepwise regression analyses are presented in Table 3.

Finally, the linear multiple regression equation was developed as follows: Equation in B: Y = 0.334 + 0.349X1 + 0.239 X2 + 0. 263 X3 + 0.117 X4

Y= Self-efficiency of rural women
X1, X2, X3, X4 = the variables of the above equation (X1= economic factor, X2= extension-educational factor, X3= self-esteem and X4 = social factor)

Table 3

Multiple Stepwise Regression Coefficients for Dependent Variable (Self-Efficacy of Rural Women) (N = 613)

Predictors	R	R square	Adjusted R square	B	Beta	t	*p*-value
Constant	——-	——-	——-	0.334	——-	2.291*	0.022
Economic factors	0.661	0.438	0.437	0.349	0.352	8.906**	0.000
Extension-Educational factors	0.713	0.508	0.507	0.239	0.251	6.519**	0.000
Self-esteem	0.736	0.542	0.539	0.263	0.238	7.151**	0.000
Social factors	0.739	0.546	0.543	0.117	0.103	2.581*	0.010

** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

CONCLUSION

The Pearson correlation results showed a positive, significant relationship between extension-educational factors and self-efficiency of rural women. These results are confirmed by the findings of Abu al-Fathzadeh et al. (2017), Ebrahimi et al. (2014), Shahriari (2008), UNESCO (2014). Also, there was a positive significant relationship between participation factors in family decision-making and self-efficiency of rural women. These results confirmed the results of other studies such as Shahriari (2008), UNESCO (2014), Malhotra et al. (2014) who also showed a significant relationship between participation factors in family decision-making and rural women self-efficiency.

According to the Pearson correlation results, there was a positive, significant relationship between social factors and the self-efficiency of rural women. These results confirmed the results of Barimani et al. (2012), Kaldi and Salahshouri (2012), Shahriari (2008), and Malhotra et al (2014). Also, the Pearson correlation results revealed a positive and significant relationship between dynamics and spatial dynamics and self-efficiency of rural women. These results are consistent with the results of Qanbari and Ansari (2015), Shahriari (2008), and Malhotra et al. (2014). Also, based on the results of the Pearson correlation between economic factors and self-efficiency of rural women, there is a positive and significant relation-

ship. These results are in agreement with the results of Qanbari and Ansari (2015), Ebrahimi et al. (2014), Shahriari (2008), Malhotra et al. (2014), and Mahmud et al. (2012). Concerning the relationship between self-esteem and self-efficiency of rural women, the results of the Pearson correlation showed a positive and significant relationship. These results are consistent with the results of Malhotra et al. (2014). Concerning the ability to cope with shocks and stresses, the Pearson correlation results show a positive and significant correlation between the capacity to deal with shocks and stresses and the self-efficiency of rural women. These results confirm the results reported by Malhotra et al. (2014). Also, the Pearson correlation results revealed a negative and significant relationship between age and the self-efficiency of rural women. These results confirm the results of Ebrahimi et al. (2014), Berimani et al. (2012), Shahriari (2008), Hosein (2013) and Malhotra et al. (2014). The Kruskal Wallis test results showed a significant difference between women with different levels of education regarding self- Efficiency at the level of 99%. These results are consistent with the results of Qanbari and Ansari (2015), Berimani et al. (2012), Shahriari (2008), and Mahmud et al. (2012). The results of stepwise regression test, based on the standard beta, showed that economic factors, educational-extensional factors, self-esteem and social factors were the most important variables with the largest

share in accounting for the variance in the dependent variable. These results confirm the findings of AbualFathZadeh et al. (2017), Qanbari and Ansari (2015), Ebrahimi et al. (2014), Kaldi and Salahshouri (2012), Barimani et al. (2012), Shahriari (2008), Niknami (2003), Farrokhi (2002), Malhotra et al. (2014), UNESCO (2014), Hosein (2013) and Mahmud et al. (2012).

Based on the results of the research, the following suggestions are drawn:
• Since the interest rate of loans contributes to the financial autonomy of rural women, local organizations (like rural women cooperatives) should cooperate with the agricultural offices and banks to grant unprofitable loans to rural women.

• Since access to the facilities and equipment necessary for self-employment and family involvement in the self-efficiency of rural women is recommended to provide lending by establishing rural funds and women's membership in these funds.

• Organizing training courses through educational workshops in the villages, as well as broadcasting educational programs over the local radio or on TV on entrepreneurial methods and strategies could be helpful in promoting rural women's self-efficiency.

• Given the fact that women are culturally more comfortable with female facilitators and assistants, it is suggested that the Jihad-e-Agriculture Organization use female extension agents as a communication link between themselves and rural women and teach them about self-efficiency enhancement strategies.

• Designing a pilot demonstration of successful women businesses in villages may promote the self-efficiency of rural women.

• Because mental barriers such as lack of motivation, certain beliefs, fear, weakness, or lack of skills in communication, management, personal and weak imagination, guilt feelings and resistance to any changes are obstacles in different forms in the individuals' mindset, it is suggested that female extension agents promote the sense of self-esteem among women with the help of psychologists and so-

cial science experts.
• Participation in associations and social groups as well as rural cooperatives, which provide training on the self-efficiency and entrepreneurship of women, as well as the provision of loans and support for women's employment is recommended.

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