The Effect of Public Awareness and Social Cohesion on the Social Participation of Women
(Case study: Female Students from Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran)

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Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to study the impact of public awareness and social cohesion on social participation of women in Iran. Since women constitute half of the population, their participation in political, economic, social and cultural areas can play an important role in community development. The study employs modernization approach as the conceptual framework and data collection is based on field and library methods. The target population included 26,742 female students of Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch of Tehran, out of which 480 individuals were selected as the study sample based on simple random sampling. To analyze the data in the inferential statistics section, the coefficient of TB and TC in the ordinal measurement level were first computed and then, due to promotion of the measurement level from ordinal to interval, Pearson coefficient correlation and multiple and univariate regressions were employed to assess the effects of the collective and simultaneous independent variables on the dependent variable. Analysis of variance was used to verify hypotheses and statistical significance of the effects of the variables. The findings showed that the research hypotheses, including universality, solidarity and interaction with others, socio-economic status, public awareness, and the research assumptions were all confirmed at a significance level of 0.0001.

Keywords: Public awareness, Solidarity, Social participation, Universalism, Socio-economic status.

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1. Introduction:

Human beings are not able to live alone; rather it is achieved with conscious cooperation and participation. The culture of every community determines participation in it and directs it civil law. This, itself, has originated from differences in cultural characteristics and governance of each community over time. Certainly since the emergence of civilization, participation has been one of its requirements, many of which rooted in religious beliefs nation-states. The world today is moving towards transferring more responsibility to people because the importance of public participation in general and national development of countries has become evident and social planners utilize various forms of democratic and participatory planning, because they believe that people's inclusive participation in program issues and community affairs is one of the main factors in the success of programs and projects. It is crystal clear that women's participation in social activities can particularly cause institutionalization of culture of participation in community and consequently an overall development of a society.

Global studies and experience have proved that women's presence in urban and administrative decision-making has considerably contributed to improve the quality of public services in developing countries. Women's participation in country's managerial decision-making not only helps the optimal use of social capital to increase productivity but it also helps improve the two national indices of adjusted human development based on gender and sexual components (Liyusinia, 2003, p. 12). Historical studies witness that the participation and role of women have not been the same among different ethnic groups, the reason for which includes many factors such as political, social and cultural structures that affect people's social roles. Social participation of women in the history of Iran has taken different shapes due to fluctuations in the process of development and under the influence of numerous objective conditions and subjective factors in micro-, meso- and macro-levels. Considering the above, studies addressing such issues are necessary.

2. Statement of the Problem:

Women constitute half of the population in each society. So this section of the population can share a lot in the development of society. But cultural differences and social conditions and developments in the social structure have made the role of the two sexes fundamentally-historically different. In fact, participation has long been linked with human life. But attention to the phenomenon of social participation found its way into social and political systems of the West two hundred years ago. But

attention to the phenomenon of participation and emphasis on its role as a major contributor to development in the developing world has intensified a lot after the defeat of methods and development programs in the 1950s and 1960s, which were imported from the West into the developing countries. In the evaluation of these programs, it was the lack of public participation that was the main cause of failure of development programs. However, today participation is a core and integral component of development and its importance and necessity is growing day by day (Vahida, 2004, p. 146). The term Public Participation is used today more than ever. Because many programs adopt community participation approaches and viewpoints in the project implementation process and many programs are based on the participation of all community members in the implementation of all or part of them.

Population, resources and participation constitute the three pillars of sustainable development. The difference is that participation, compared to the other two pillars, has a structural role and the other two factors (people and resources) function within its structural frame. In a society where rapid change are experienced in terms of quantity and quality in all aspects, and managers face a host of new and increasingly complex problems today, public participation and organizations can play an important role in managing and directing affairs towards an optimal society (Vahida, 2004, p. 146). But participation which is indispensable for sustainable development involves all sectors and groups (both men and women), and there is no doubt that the role of women must be known as half of the community and in a sense even more than half. If they can freely participate in social issues, it is possible for the community to utilize its potentials and accelerate the process of achieving sustainable development.

But this is while they face many barriers and limitations and cannot easily enter into cooperative fields and their participation rights are violated in many communities (Sepasi, 2005, p. 17). This has also been proven in a survey conducted by Shaditalab (2001).Her study illustrated that 70% of women belonged to the passive and isolated group in terms of social participation level and only 30% of them were in the relatively high level of participation and were regarded as social activists (Shaditalab, 2002).

But with regard to the issues raised above, the problem now is how to achieve a sustainable and spontaneous process of participation. In other words, the current problem is how to establish and institutionalize people's participation, especially the participation of women in society, which is achievable through historical knowledge and determining the factors affecting it, especially in developing countries like Iran that are facing the problem of order and development. The present research, therefore,

aims to study the effect of public awareness and social cohesion on women's social participation among female students of Islamic Azad University, Sciences and Research Branch in Tehran.

3. Theoretical Foundations

Some experts' opinions have been studied through three functional-structural, conflict and the mixed theoretical approaches. Most topics of the structural-functional theory have been presented in connection with the development and participation in terms of modernization approach and in cultural, political and social dimensions. In this view, participation is considered as one of development institutions and an important tool to achieve development goals. Structural-functional approach stands in contrast to the conflict theory. This approach mainly underscores inequalities and social and economic classes, social alienation and the role of the colonial and authoritarian regimes in the nature of human societies. The conflict theory with dependency approach and with an emphasis on historical structures of power, system of social stratification and relationship of center-periphery in terms of fundamental changes underscores the real participation of the general public. This approach has presented a teleological interpretation of participation during which participation is seen as one of the objectives and as enabling some people.

In this context, Huntington has referred to the role of absence of social cohesion and trust in the growth of particularism in the personality systems of individuals. He believes the spread of mistrust in Third World societies limit their loyalty to groups that are familiar and close to them. This loyalty is based on closer economic and social groupings such as family, village, clan, social class, etc., and competes against loyalty to wider institutions of public authority and often finds hegemony over them (Huntington, 1991, p. 50).

In modernization approach, in addition to issues of trust and the economic-social status, emphasis is placed on the participation of personality traits of individuals as the basis of development and participation. Experts in modernization approach have considered elements such as mutual trust, universalism, foresight, willingness to progress as a leaven of renewal and development, and in contrast, have considered particularism, fatalism and being past-oriented as barriers to participation and development.

With pattern variables, Talcott Parsons, one of the most important experts in social modernization, has studied different value patterns that govern the behavior of the individual in connection with others. In his view, social action encompasses all human

behaviors that motivate and guide those meanings that the actor finds in the outside world; the meanings that attract their attention, and to which they respond. Therefore, the main feature of social action lies in the actor's sensitivity to the meaning of things and creatures that exist in the environment and awareness of these meanings and responses to messages they send (Rouche, 1997, p. 56).

Parsons' action theory considers social action in three the abstract levels. In the first level of abstraction that is close to reality, three concepts of action, actor, and the action situation arise. In the second level of abstract action, four types of activity and their relationship are broached that include proof or organic system, the tendency or personality system, social system and cultural system.

At the third level of abstract action, the overall concept of action system is put forward which is obtained from a combination of four cultural, social, personal, and proof (organic) subsystems. In the present study, the main unit of analysis and observation are both the "individual" and different analytical systems such as organic, behavioral and personality systems can be imagined for each individual as a reference system. Personality has a special meaning for Parsons. He defines the personality system as the theoretical site of relationships between organisms (biological organism) and outside objects in the environment, in particular the social and cultural objects. Personality is confluence of motivation and energy on the one hand, that eventually have organic origin, and the meeting-place of values and norms on the other, that have risen from social and cultural environment. From Parsons' viewpoint, combination of value orientation patterns of socialization achieved by the actor at the time of socialization is to a large extent a function of the structure and the fundamental values of the dominant social system (Ritzer, 1995, p. 462). In fact, pattern variables express the process of social interaction of individuals towards its own position and are structural conditions of the action. For Parsons the variable here means choice of an option from a dichotomous variant from which the social agent must choose one. Parsons calls this alternative notion of dual choice idea variables and classifies them as follows (Fakhraee, 1997, p. 92): 1. emotionality vs. emotional neutrality; 2. collective orientation vs. individual orientation; 3. appointed vs. acquired function; 4. particularism vs. generalism.

In his discussion of civil and participatory society, Jeffrey Alexander speaks of trust. Alexander considers discourse of civil society "double discourse" and believes that this dialogue occurs at three levels: motivations, relationships, and institutions. He takes into account criteria and anti-criteria within this discourse, which raises human nature in a quite opposite way. Because democracy needs restraint and individual

initiative, people who create it are described as pragmatic and independent rather passive and dependent (Ritzer, 1995, p. 195). Another effective factor is the information that the wealth and capital of any nation.

It is the knowledge owned by members of a social network and it can be seen as its wealth and capital of each nation, the wealth that becomes more robust and complete the more it is consumed. Fukuyama (1997) believes that one must have sufficient knowledge about the available social networks and its features before entering into any business or social system. In fact, people's social capital and community involvement decrease when they are unaware of the nature of social issues or are not aware of the plans responsive for social problems and are uniformed about their surrounding community.

4. Research Hypotheses
- Universality affects women's social participation.
- Integration and interaction with others affect women's social participation.
- Socio-economic status affects women's social participation.
- Public awareness affects women's social participation.

5. Methodology
For a social issue to be well understood, it is necessary to be studied with precise attitude emerged from a field of sociological thought. According to research problem, the most appropriate method in this research is survey method. Since the survey research is done in various ways, the present study must, by definition, be considered a cross-sectional survey study. Data collection is both library and field methods. In this case, theoretical information was obtained through library and archival research. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data and the final questionnaire was prepared after pilot testing and possible improvements. Women students of Islamic Azad University, Tehran Sciences and Research Branch, were selected as the study population at the micro level of analysis for the study of barriers to social participation. The population comprised 26,742 students, of which 480 students were selected as sample by means of Cochran sampling formula and 379 completed questionnaires were finally collected. To calculate the sample, non-purposive random sampling was used.

6. Findings

In this section, the hypotheses of this study will be discussed using data from the sample.

6.1. Data normality test

First it was necessary to check whether universalism and social participation followed a normal distribution, for which the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was used.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of variables

Variables	Statistics	Sig.
Social Participation	1.113	0.168
Cooperation	1.073	0.199
Universalism	1.192	0.111
Socio-economic Status	1.2629	0.0752
Public Awareness	1.0032	0.1721

As the table illustrates, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics for variables of universalism, cooperation, socio-economic status, public awareness and social participation equal are 1.311, 1.073, 1.192, 1.2629, and 1.0032, respectively. With regard to their significance levels of 0.168, 0.199, 0.111, 0.0752, and 0.1721 (all>0.05), their normality assumption was confirmed. Therefore, Pearson correlation was used to test the correlation between the above-mentioned variables and social participation.

Hypothesis 1:
Universalism affects social participation.

Table 2. Correlation between universalism and social participation

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Amount	Sig.
Universalism	0.437	297	0.0001

According to the Pearson correlation between universalism and social participation (0.437), the positive relationship between the two variables is confirmed at the $p<0.01$ level. This confirms the hypothesis that as universalism increases, social participation will further increase. To test this hypothesis, simple regression model was used and the analysis results are reported as follows:

Table 3. Results of regression analysis

Correlation coefficient	Determination coefficient	Adjusted determination coefficient	Standard error coefficient of determination
0.437	0.191	0.186	8.70450

The table above illustrates the correlation coefficients and coefficient of determination between the universalism of social participation where 19% of changes in social participation is related to changes in universalism because of the correlation coefficient of 0.437 and determination coefficient of 0.191.

Table 4. ANOVA regression of the effect of universalism on social contribution

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3089.978	1	3089.978	87.54	0.0001
Error	13107.930	377	32.43		
Sum	16197.909	378			

According to above table, Fisher statistic is 87.54 p=0001. Thus, the assumption of the impact of universalism on the establishment of social participation is confirmed. The following table shows t test and univariate linear regression coefficients of model of impact of universalism on social participation.

Table 5. T- test and univariate linear regression coefficients of the impact of universalism on social participation

regression Model		Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized coefficient	Test	Sig.
		Coefficients	Standard Error			
Error	Constant	542.776	5.192		5.330	0.000
	Growth Rate	0.187	0.331	0.447	2.367	0.000

Regression model between universalism and social participation is as follows:

Social participation = 0.187* universalism + 542.776

Hypothesis 2:

Cooperation affects women's social participation.

According to findings in Table 1, the assumption of normality of variables is confirmed. Therefore, Pearson correlation was used to test the correlation between cooperation and social participation.

Table 6. Correlation significance level of between cooperation and social participation

Variables	Pearson correlation	N	Sig.
Social participation and cooperation	0.368	397	0.00001

According to the Pearson correlation between cooperation and social participation (0.368), the positive relationship between cooperation and social participation is confirmed at $p<0.01$. Therefore, the substitute assumption is verified. The more social participation rises, the more the cooperation will increase. The results of the test will be discussed in detail in the next section. Univariate regression model was used to test whether cooperation affects social participation, the results of which are reported as follows.

Table 7. Determination coefficient of the regression model of cooperation and social participation

Correlation coefficient	determination coefficient	Adjusted determination coefficient	Standard error coefficient of determination
0.368a	0.136	0.133	49.09814

In this table, the correlation and the determination coefficient between cooperation and social participation has been specified. Because the correlation coefficient is 0.368 and determination coefficient is 0.136, therefore 13% of changes related to social participation depend on changes in cooperation.

Table 8. ANOVA and regression related to cooperation and social participation

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	142750.803	1	142750.803	59.217	0.000a
Error	908806.641	377	2410.628		
Sum	1051557.445	378			

As the Table above shows, the Fisher statistic equals to 59.217 and the significance level is 0.0001. Thus, the assumption of the impact of cooperation on social participation is confirmed. The following table illustrates t test and significance level of univariate linear regression coefficients that confirmed the impact cooperation on social participation.

Table 9. T-test and univariate linear regression coefficients of impact of cooperation on social participation

Regression Model		Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	Test	Sig.
		Coefficients	Standard Error			
Error	Constant	508.616	19.698		25.821	0.000
	Secure work conditions	0.347	0.045	0.368	7.695	0.000

Regression model between the cooperation and social participation is as follows.

social participation = 0.374 * cooperation + 508.61

Hypothesis 3:

Social-economic Status affects women's social participation.

According to Table 1, the assumption of normality of variables is confirmed. Therefore, Pearson correlation coefficient is used to test the correlation between socio-economic status and women's social participation.

Table 10: Correlation between socio-economic status and social participation

Variables	Pearson correlation	N	Sig.
Socio-economic status and social participation	0.327	379	0.0001

According to Pearson correlation between socio-economic status and women's social participation (0.327), the positive relationship between socio-economic status and social participation is confirmed at $p<0.01$. The results of the test will be discussed in detail in the next section. To test this hypothesis, simple regression model is used and the analysis of results is presented below.

Table 11. Correlation and model determination coefficients of effect of socio-economic status on social participation

Correlation coefficient	determination coefficient	Adjusted determination coefficient	Standard error coefficient of determination
0.327	0.1069	0.946	4.2473

In this table, the correlation and determination coefficients between socio-economic status and women's social participation have been determined. Since the correlation coefficient is equal to 0.327 and the determination coefficient is equal to

0.1069, 10% of the changes related to social participation are dependent upon changes in socio-economic status.

Table 12. Regression ANOVA of impact of socio-economic status on social participation

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
regression	2697.362	1	2697.362	73.24	0.000
Error	14721.742	377	23.73		
Sum	16197.909	378			

As the above table illustrates, the Fisher statistics corresponds to 73.24 and the significance level is equal to 0.0001, thus the assumption of the impact of socio-economic status on women's social participation is confirmed. The following table shows t test and univariate linear regression coefficients related to the impact of socio-economic status on social participation.

Table 13. T- test and univariate linear regression coefficients of the impact of socio-economic status on social participation

Regression Model		Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	Test	Sig.
		Coefficients	Standard Error			
linear	Constant	421.653	5.872		7.822	0.000
	Socio-economic Status	0.193	0.0288	0.0327	2.625	0.001

Regression model between socio-economic status and social participation is as follows:

$$social\ participation = 0.193 * socio\text{-}economic\ status + 421.658$$

Hypothesis 4:

Public awareness affects women's social participation.

According to the findings of Table 1, the assumption of normality of variables is confirmed. Therefore, Pearson correlation coefficient is used to test the correlation between public awareness and women's social participation.

Table 14. Correlation between public awareness and social participation

Variables	Pearson correlation	N	Sig.
Public awareness and social participation	0.361	379	0.0001

According to the Pearson correlation between public awareness and social participation (0.386), the positive relationship between the public awareness and women's social participation is confirmed at $p<0.01$. The higher the public awareness, the higher social participation will be. To test whether public awareness affects social participation, univariate regression model was used, the results of which are presented below.

Table 15. Correlation and model determination coefficients of effect of public awareness on social participation

Correlation coefficient	determination coefficient	Adjusted determination coefficient	Standard error coefficient of determination
0.316	0.1248	0.1209	3.0864

In this table, the correlation coefficient and the determination coefficient between public awareness and women's social participation have been calculated. Since the correlation coefficient equals to 0.386 and the coefficient of determination is equal to 0.12, 12% of changes in social participation is related to change in women's public awareness.

Table 16. Regression ANOVA of the impact of public awareness on social participation

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3374.359	1	3374.359	82.12	0.000
Error	16611.933	377	31.12		
Sum	16197.909	379			

Table 16 shows Fisher statistic (82.12) and the significance level (0.0001). Thus, the assumption of the impact of public awareness on women's social participation is confirmed. The following table shows t-test and significance level related to verification of univariate linear regression coefficients of the impact of public awareness on social participation.

Table 17. T- test and univariate linear regression coefficients of impact of public awareness on social participation

Regression model		Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	Test	Sig.
		Coefficients	Standard Error			
Linear	Constant	369.532	4.721		8.650	0.000
	Public awareness	0.175	0.0326	0.0386	2.411	0.000

Regression model between public awareness and participation is as follows:

participation = 0.175 * public awareness + 369.532

7. Conclusions

Scholars such as Durkheim and Huntington underscore cohesion as one of the effective factors on participation, whereas thinkers like Fukuyama consider elements like public awareness, modernization approach, socio-economic status, mutual trust, foresight, universalism and desire to progress as the essence of modernization and development. The results of the present research, too, show the significant impact of these factors on social participation of women. Therefore, with regard to the worldwide emphasis, especially in developing countries, on achieving the goals of an overall development, i.e., sustainable and human development, due attention to the participation of women in positions of decision-making and in the management of the country not only contributes to optimal consumption of social capital for the increase of national efficiency, but it also promotes human development index based on gender and sexual components. But according to the theoretical and empirical research findings and results of the present study, appropriate strategies can be presented to enhance the quality and quantity of women's social participation.

8. Suggestions

1. Promotion of social unity and cultural cohesion through paying respect to the rights of social and cultural groups and reduction of social and cultural conflicts within the framework of compiled and appointed social and cultural programs (Seifollahi, 1991, p. 173).

2. With regard to the key role of social capital and public culture of the society in creating common bonds in the community, the increase of social capital is required to be paid attention by social and cultural planners taking into account the two issues of

social cohesion and social trust. Arguably, the clustering of social relations and mutual distrust will lead to a break in the social interactions and bonds and disturbance in development and social participation.

3. Establishment of cultural counseling centers for women.

4. Promotion of political development of the country and improvement of the management of society, especially in relation to women's issues and their social participation. The significant relationship between women's trust in community management and their participation requires that women enjoy equal legal rights with men and comparative studies are required to be done to review and eliminate laws that are against women having equal rights with men.

5. Development of personal, social, cultural, political and economic security based on distinctive, balanced, and strategic policies such as elimination of gender-based harassment in women's workplace, especially in the private sector.

6. The transition process of Iranian society requires a change in the modes of socialization, particularly in the educational systems of family and equality of human rights. Therefore, compiling educational programs for educating and promoting refusionism practices, accountability and ever more recognition of human rights are of great importance in this regard. This is important in the spread of spirit of cooperation in women's applied fields for their participation.

7. Considering the significant role of cooperative organizations and institutions involved in the development and completion processes of participation and creation of collective cooperative networks and the empowerment of women in order to identify and trace their social and political demands, preparing the ground for the formation of these organizations and institutions in the community is essential. To this end, it is necessary to consider the following:

7.1. Increase in the number of cultural institutions, particularly scientific associations of non-government educational and research centers and improvement of the quality of their performance.

7.2. Establishment of scientific associations in creating interaction and dialogue between men and women and arising common issues, production and promotion of ideas and scientific data, and establishment of the necessary measures to deal with social issues and inequalities.

8. Development of women's personality in the cultural, social and political dimensions is quite necessary. For this purpose, the development of individualism, generalization of the individual's emotional attachments to larger communities, a sense of duty against the interests of the general public and strengthening the tendency

of the individual to democracy and collective contributions are necessary, and can increase their confidence and readiness for action and presence in social life, particularly in cooperation with civil society institutions to fulfill the collective goals (Abdollahi, 2008, p. 176).

9. Elimination of discrimination in terms of job qualification for women.

10. Creating more balance and proportionality between education and job categories for women.

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