

The Effect of Employment Generation Projects On Empowerment Of Rural Women's In Markazi Province, Iran

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ABSTRACT : Availability of employment opportunities, particularly for women, is widely recognized as an important indicator of development. Enhancement of women's socioeconomic position and improvement of their participation in their community are some of the results of women's empowerment and employment. Communities that underscore empowerment of women, function successfully particularly in terms of economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, and income distribution. This descriptive-correlational study examines the effects of employment generation schemes on employment and empowerment of rural women in Markazi Province, Iran. The statistical population consisted of rural women who participated in training programs conducted through employment generation projects and are currently benefiting from employment (N=420). Using proportional stratified sampling method, 150 women were selected. Also, 100 women were selected as the non-participant group. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a panel of experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable for the purpose of research (Alpha Cronbach's= 0.89). Based on the results of the study, training programs included in employment generation projects have positively affected employment rate, men's attitude towards women's capabilities, and households' income. With regard to livelihood decisions, the results of the t-test approved that project participants were more capable in decision making about life-related issues compared to their non-participant counterparts. Significant relationships exist between variables such as age, income, savings, and employment generation with the variable of rural women's empowerment with employment generation variable having the greatest influence. Additionally, it appears from the results that the aforementioned variables could explain 54.4 % of the variance in the dependent variable of rural women's empowerment.

KEY WORDS: Training, employment, empowerment, rural women, Markazi province, Iran.

I. INTRODUCTION

Employment and employment generation have significant positive effects on human behaviors and spirits. These positive effects include, but are not limited to, socialization, achievement of a general concept of life, and development of personality. Women's employment and social inclusion i.e. involvement in positive beneficial activities are associated with development of skills, enhancement of social interactions, development of personality and professional characteristics, and promotion of socio-economic status [1]. Thanks to their various roles in rural contexts, rural women influence on economic conditions and food production. Around the world, women involve in wage-labor employment, particularly in economic crisis, to help their households with costs. Therefore, regardless of living in either a male-headed or a female-headed household, women work to address their economic needs [2]. It is widely known that human resource development is a priority for development programs. Considering that women comprise half of the rural population, part of governmental investments should be directed towards them if human resource development is targeted. Women's human development is more than just increasing efficiency of their labor force and thus must address economic, cultural, and social development goals within development processes as well. United Nation's schemes for empowerment of women initiated in different regions have resulted in increased confidence among them and thereby contributed to improvement of their life quality. For instance, several training programs have been conducted for women in various domains in Ethiopia. The statistics reveal that these programs could improve their confidence and helped them believe in themselves [3]. Malhotra et al. [4] believe that empowerment is a process through which women can organize themselves, improve their confidence, make free choices, and control their resources. Empowerment consists of three elements or concepts. The first element of empowerment is 'resource'. Factors such as education and employment can be considered as sources of empowerment. According to Kabeer [5] resources serve as enabling factors that foster the empowerment process. The second element of empowerment is 'agency' in other words, rather than being merely recipients, women themselves must play a key role in the process of change that is being described/ measured.

It encompasses the ability of formulating strategic choices and controlling resources and decisions that significantly affect their life outcomes. The significance of agency in the discourse of empowerment emerges from “bottom up” rather than “top down” approaches toward development [4]. The third element of empowerment is ‘achievement or outcome’. Achievements may range from fulfillment of basic needs to more complicated issues such as satisfaction, self-esteem, and participation [6]. Empowerment encompasses various concepts and definitions from different social, economic, and political viewpoints. However, many of these definitions include common concepts such as self-reliance, power of making choices, independence, decision-making, self-confidence, and awareness. Empowerment is a process through which individuals, in order to tackle obstacles, get involved in activities that help them determine their own destiny. Empowerment does not merely refer to economic empowerment. Landers believes that there are different approaches towards power including power over (relationship between dominance and dependence), power to (ability to make decisions and solve problems), power with (to reach goals), and power from within (self-confidence). Accordingly, empowerment of women is a process through which women get access to and control over sources of power and thereby can play a more powerful role in making decisions about resources and their surrounding [7].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In their study on empowerment of women, Ketabi et al. [8] argued that financial self-efficacy and removal of obstacles from the labor market may pave the way for women’s participation and thereby result in empowerment. Salahi Esfehiani [9] believes that rural women’s employment is crucial to efforts aimed at enhancement of rural community’s status quo. Noori and Ghaffari [10] add to the list of factors that accelerate rural women’s empowerment and suggest that extension-education courses and rural women’s control on and ownership of resources and production factors can result development of rural areas. Amiri Ardakani [11] also emphasized on the significance of training for rural women and suggested that training courses can help women participate in decision making processes. Similarly, Amini et al. [12] suggest that training is vital to development efforts and may result employment and financial self-efficacy. Safari shali [13] in his research on rural women’s participation in Zanjan province enumerated facilitating factors such as training for the purpose of skill development, establishment of self-confidence, creation of eagerness and enthusiasm, and support from organizations as factors that exert influence on empowerment of rural women. Shakoori [14] in his study on women supported by Emdad Committee of Imam Khomeini suggested that only those women who benefited from self employment and training courses were empowered. Saeie and Valipour [15] in their study on factors affecting women’s empowerment argued that variables such as education, economic factors, and employment influence empowerment of women. Since, presence of skillful and trained women in rural production is fundamental to rural development efforts, training and employment should be considered as a prerequisite for women’s empowerment. To this, employment generation projects coupled with training programs can result in empowerment, improvement, and reconstruction of the workforce. Currently, besides housekeeping, management, and taking care of children, most of women’s activities in rural settings are concentrated on farming and horticulture, livestock rearing, poultry, bee-keeping, processing industries, handicrafts, etc. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to identify the effects of employment generation projects on women’s empowerment, employment, and participation.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on a descriptive-correlation survey. The statistical population consisted of 150 rural women who participated in employment generation projects and 100 rural women who did not participate in these projects. The size of the sample was determined using Kerjice and Morgan’s Table [16]. Random sampling method was used to draw the sample. Based on the review of documents and interviews with experts, the research instrument was designed. The questionnaire contained two sections. The first section included personal and professional characteristics of rural women while the second section included the effects of employment generation projects and rural women’s empowerment. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by faculty members of University of Tarbiat Modarres and experts in the office of rural women’s issues. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha which was acceptable for the purpose of study ($\alpha=0.89$). To deal with data, SPSS 18 was employed. Frequency, mean, standard deviation, CV were used in the descriptive analysis and t-test was employed to compare participant and non-participant rural women.

IV. RESULTS

Demographic characteristics

From the results of the study on rural women who were members of employment generation projects, it appears that respondents were between 18 and 55 years old (with the average of 34) and the greatest share of the sample belonged to the category of 30-40. Results revealed that 46 % of the respondent households had between 4-6 family members. Generally, 86 % of the respondent households had less than 7 family members. According

to the results, 60 % of the respondents were married and the remainder was single. Approximately, 17 % of the households of the respondents were female-headed while the remainder was male-headed (headed either by a husband or a father). With regard to literacy, about 58 % of the respondents (87 respondents) held less than high school education, 16.7 % held high school diploma or higher while only 4 % were illiterate. The average age of non-participants was 38 varying between 19 and 55 years old while the majority of respondents were classified under the category of 30-40. The household size of more than half of this group of respondents ranged between 4-6 members while 96 % of them had less than 7 members. More than 80 % of the non-participants were married and the remainder was single. Also, 75 % of this group of respondents had high school diploma while 25 % had less than high school education. Only 2 % of them were illiterate. Surveyed groups (participant and non participant respondents) show no marked differences with respect to personal characteristics which is an indication of homogeneity of their community. These results are in line with the findings of a study carried out by Karami et al. [17] [19] that a great number of rural women are literate. Also, these findings contrast with the results of a study carried out by Shaybani and Afshari [18] showing that a considerable number of women working in agriculture sector are illiterate.

Ranking of effects of training courses on employment generation for rural women

An examination of respondents’ rankings of eight specific effects of training courses on a scale from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High) helped understand their importance in employment generation (Table 1). However, at analytical level, these scales were condensed to three (low, moderate, high). In general, ‘employment generation’ (average=2.73), ‘development of positive attitude among men towards women’s capabilities’ (2.56), ‘generation of additional income for women and their households’ (average=2.46) were on the top of the list. Nevertheless, ‘provision of welfare facilities’ (average=2.026) and ‘generation of income and supply of livelihood needs’ (average=2.33) were of less importance from respondents’ point of view.

Table 1: Ranking of specific effects of training courses on rural women’s employment from respondents’ viewpoint

Statement	Mean*	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation	Rank
(1) employment generation	2/733	0/50	0/183	1
(2) development of positive attitude among men towards women’s capabilities	2/560	0/66	0/257	2
(3) generation of additional income for women and their households	2/460	0/73	0/296	3
(4) Generate employment and income for poor families	2/466	0/73	0/296	4
(5) Solve economic problems	2/433	0/81	0/333	5
(6) Reduce migration to cities	2/253	0/80	0/355	6
(7) generation of income and supply of livelihood needs	2/333	0/79	0/339	7
(8) provision of welfare facilities	2/026	0/86	0/424	8

Ranking of statements related to empowerment from participants’ viewpoint

In order to learn more about the effects of conducted training courses on rural women’s empowerment, respondents were asked to rate 17 statements on a 5-point Likert scale (ranged from very low to very high) which was later condensed to three. As summarized in Table 2, ‘helping others’, ‘improving their own ‘abilities’, and ‘foreseeing a bright future for themselves and their household’ were ranked higher than other items. From respondents’ point of view, ‘selling products’, ‘wandering around the city’ and “referring to public organizations” were of less importance.

Table 2: Ranking of statements related to empowerment from participants’ viewpoint

Statement	Mean*	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation	Rank
helping others	2/760	0/48	0/17	1
improving their own abilities	2/660	0/55	0/20	2
foreseeing a bright future for themselves and their household’	2/680	0/55	0/20	3
See a bright future for themselves and their family	2/646	0/58	0/21	4

Result of efforts	2/624	0/58	0/22	5
Find the solution to problems	2/473	0/58	0/23	6
Success	2/493	0/62	0/24	7
Self-content	2/600	0/64	0/24	8
Visiting relatives and acquaintances.	2/313	0/64	0/27	9
Ability to escape poverty	2/440	0/66	0/27	10
To better future for themselves and their families	2/533	0/69	0/27	11
The ability to change destiny.	2/313	0/77	0/33	12
Going to Health center	2/353	0/80	0/33	13
Buying from the City	2/313	0/82	0/35	14
referring to public organizations	2/286	0/83	0/36	15
wandering around the city	2/113	0/83	0/39	16
selling products	2/153	0/88	0/40	17

No significant differentiation exists between two investigated groups of respondents (participant and non-participant) with respect to the level of empowerment. Considering that one of the main goals of employment generation projects is empowerment, t-test was used to compare groups of respondents (participant and non-participant) regarding achievement of this objective. Comparison of results presented in Table 3, shows that these two groups contrast significantly with regard to empowerment (Sig= 0.000, t= 10.736). In other words, those respondents who participated in employment generation projects (with an average of 63.50) were more empowered compared to their non-participant counterparts (with an average of 44.42).

Table 3: Comparison of participant and non-participant respondents regarding their level of empowerment

Variable	Variables level	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	t value	Sig.
Empowerment	participant	150	63/500	15/046	10/736**	0/000
	non- participant	100	44/420	11/577		

p≤0/001**

Considering that the calculated *t* is less than *t* in the table, the null hypothesis implying that there exists no difference between two groups regarding their empowerment, is rejected.

Correlation among studied variables and empowerment

In order to investigate the relationships between studied variables and the variable of empowerment Pearson correlation was used. table 4.

Table 4: The relationship between studied variables and the variable of empowerment

Statement	r	Sig
years of employment	0/282**	0/000
Income	0/304**	0/000
Savings	0/329**	0/000
Level of education	0/061	0/461
employment generation	0/590**	0/000

Sig= 0/001**

Table 4 presents information on the results of the correlation analysis. Accordingly, years of employment, income, savings, and employment generation are associated significantly and positively with the variable of empowerment.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The effects of independent variables including years of employment, income, saving, and employment generation were investigated on the dependent variable of empowerment through multiple regression. Accordingly, variables of employment, yeas of employment, saving, and income were entered into the model in four

steps

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Table 5: Affecting factors on empowerment

Independent variables	R ²	R ² _{adj}	B	Beta	T	Sig.**	D.W
Constant	----	----	6/510	----	1/204	0/308	
Employment	0/343	0/339	0/378	0/539	8/723	0/000	1/94
Years of employment	0/449	0/441	0/382	0/331	5/863	0/000	
Saving	0/504	0/494	0/633	0/376	5/457	0/000	
Income	0/544	0/531	0/758	0/247	3/569	0/000	

Sig= 0/001**

As described in Table 5, these variables could explain 54.4 % of the variation of the dependent variable.(Fig 1.)

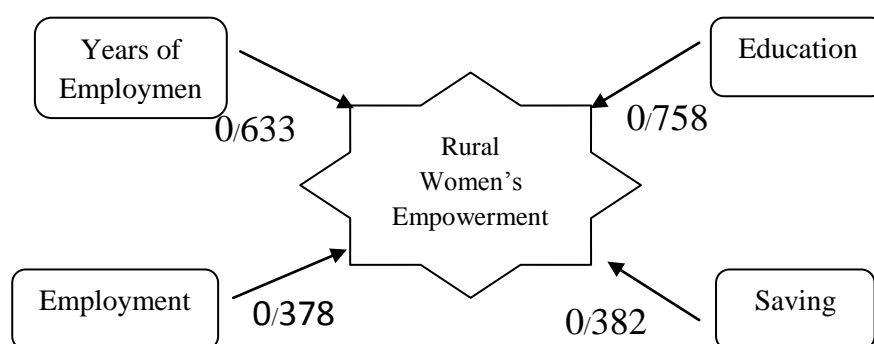


Fig 1: The relative importance of affecting variables on rural women's empowerment (Reference: research findings)

The standardized measures of Beta reveal that variables of level of education, years of employment, saving, and employment generation have had the greatest influence on rural women's empowerment.

V. CONCLUSION

Women's employment is one the factors that enhances the conditions of a household. Thus, analysis of reasons of women's employment and thereby participation in socio-economic context is of great importance. As a key factor in agricultural activities, rural women should be considered as an important factor in rural development. Without their participation, rural development is impossible. Results of this study which aimed at identification of effects of employment generation projects on empowerment of rural women revealed that half of the women who were members of employment generation projects were in the range of 30-40 years of age and thereby were young. About 60 % of respondents were married and the remainder was single. Considering the interviews, it can be interpreted that one of the main factors that impede single women's participation is cultural matters specific to rural communities. The case was similar for some of married women who believed that lack of acknowledgment of their capabilities impedes their efficient participation in their community and thereby in rural development. Similar conclusions were reached in similar studies by Amiri Ardakani and Mirakzadeh et al. [11, 17]. Skilled female trainers and expert facilitators supported by organizations can serve as an example for rural women. Yet, however, the number of experts and trained human force in the country is inadequate. Even organizations involved in women's issues suffer from lack of (or small number of) female experts. According to the results, about 60 % of the respondents had high school diploma. The interview with rural women approved that literacy should be considered as a significant factor in women's empowerment. This result is in line with the results of a study carried out by Karami et al. [17]. Regarding acceptance and participation in projects, there exist no differences in personal characteristics of participants and non-participants. Considering that one of the main objectives of these projects was empowerment of rural women, 17 statements using a Likert scale were employed to compare participants and non-participants. Accordingly, as results approved, these projects were successful in this regard. Also, helping others, increasing women's capability, and having a positive attitude towards future are the most important effects of employment generation projects. Finally, the results of correlation analysis and regression analysis revealed that factors including employment, saving, education level, and years of employment had the most significant effect on empowerment of rural women.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study and the interviews carried out during the study, the following recommendations are made to boost the effects of initiatives aiming at empowerment of rural women:

- [1] Provision of a context for development of units and organizations supporting rural women
- [2] Changing beliefs and superficial attitudes of the rural community about women and enhancement of women's participation in activities aimed at growth and development of their capacities
- [3] Training and recruitment of experienced and skilled experts who are able to facilitate, train, and empower rural women
- [4] Enabling presence of authorities and relevant organizations to support rural women and provision of a context for smooth change of attitudes and beliefs prevailing among rural people towards women
- [5] Introduction of successful individuals and organizing celebrations to acknowledge rural women's achievements and creation of motivation among others

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