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## **PROFESSIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WHEAT FARMERS IN DEZFUL TOWNSHIP OF IRAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research was analyzing professional empowerment of women wheat farmers in Dezful Township of Iran. This research is an applied study and the research method was correlative and descriptive. Women wheat farmers in Dezful Township of Iran considered as statistical population (N=410). The sample size was 200 women wheat farmers. After designing and validating the questionnaire, the questionnaire was pre-tested among 30 people and Cronbach alpha 0.89 was determined. The main tool was a questionnaire. There were two sets of independent and dependent variables in this study. The dependent variable in this research was the professional empowerment of women wheat farmers in Dezful Township of Iran. Based on the results there was a relationship between level of entrepreneurship, social participation, self esteem, individual autonomy, creativity, income, leadership, planning, job skills, age, communication channels, and number of household members, social status and professional empowerment at % 99 levels. Linear regression was used to predict changes in professional empowerment. Leadership, communication channels, job skills, social participation, planning, creativity and age may well explain for 70.4% changes ( $R^2 = 0.704$ ) in professional empowerment.

**Keywords:** *Professional Empowerment, Women Wheat Farmers, Dezful Township*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The social and economic status of women is a reliable indicator of their empowerment in a society. There is an exhaustive list of goals to be achieved through self-help programmed which empower women with respect to saving habits, credit for production and commercial purposes, opportunities for entrepreneurship, functional literacy, developing leadership qualities, gender sensitivity and awareness about the socio-political, economic and cultural issues. Empowering women needs a holistic approach to participate in decision making in the household, community and local domestic sector and prepare women to take up leadership position in agricultural activities (Vijayalakshmi *et al.*, 2012). Women in agriculture play a vital role in wide range of activities, thereby contributing to sustainable agricultural development. To achieve inclusive agricultural growth, empowering women by having comprehensive understanding about work participation, gender issues, drudgery and health and nutritional status is necessary. Further, these issues are to be addressed through gender-friendly technology assessment, refinement and extension methodologies (ICAR, 2011).

Most of poor people are in rural areas and most of them are women. Women in rural areas with low education, low income, low health and nutrition, resulting low productivity. In addition, poor families usually owned very narrow farming land but having large number of household members, most are not educated and have no technological access, low economic opportunity. Farmer women in poor rural areas, with all their limitations, always hope to improve the family economy. Therefore, the rural poor farmer women empowerment requires sensitive policy interventions, to address the underlying problem to obtain the best results for increasing the people prosperity (Suartha *et al.*, 2014).

Women play a critical and potentially transformative role in agricultural growth in developing countries, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture (IFPRI, 2012).

The economic empowerment of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth and the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Gender equality and empowered

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women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments (OECD, 2010). Women usually invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities than men.

A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child's survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled household income (OECD, 2011). Increasing opportunities for women can have a powerful impact on productivity and agriculture-led growth.

A recent report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations concludes that closing the gender gap in access and use of productive resources would have a measurable impact on agricultural output in the developing world. The benefits also improve society as a whole; studies show that women are more likely than men to spend on their family's nutritional needs, healthcare, and school fees for children.

To better empower women agricultural producers to reach their full potential, Feed the Future promotes women's leadership in agriculture, fosters policy changes that increase women's land ownership, and strengthens their access to financial services.

Through the initiative, female farmers are encouraged to adopt new agricultural technology aimed at increasing productivity and reducing unpaid work (USAID, 2012).

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The purpose of this research was analyzing professional empowerment of women wheat farmers in Dezful Township of Iran.

This research is an applied study and the research method was correlative and descriptive. Women wheat farmers in Dezful Township of Iran considered as statistical population (N=410). The sample size was 200 women wheat farmers.

After designing and validating the questionnaire, the questionnaire was pre-tested among 30 people and Cronbach alpha 0.89 was determined. The main tool was a questionnaire. There were two sets of independent and dependent variables in this study.

The dependent variable in this research was the professional empowerment of women wheat farmers in Dezful Township of Iran. In this study, after the collection and classification of data, data analysis and according to the type of research in two stages using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were taken.

All data processing and statistical analysis was performed using the software SPSS<sub>19</sub>. For analysis data, correlative coefficients and stepwise multiple regression were used.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***Demographic Profile***

In the first section, has been described women wheat farmers demographic profile in Dezful township of Iran. Approximately, 33.5% of respondents were between 22 to 34 years of age (Table 1). Most respondents (36.5%) reported work experience between 12 to 23 years. About 32% of women had Diploma and upper educational level.

#### ***Level of Professional Empowerment of Women Wheat Farmers***

Most important parts of professional empowerment include: individual factors, communication and social factors, institutional and structural factors, and managerial and financial factors.

Based on the results, 48.5% of women had high situation of individual factors of professional empowerment, 43.5% had moderate level of communication and social factors of professional empowerment, 37% had moderate level of institutional and structural factors and 36% had moderate level of managerial and financial factors (Table 2).

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**Table 1: Personal characteristics of women wheat farmers**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age			
22-34	67	33.5	33.5
35-47	66	33	66.5
48-60	53	26.5	93
61-73	10	5	98
74-86	4	2	100
Total	200	100	
Work experience (year)			
1-11	64	32	32
12-23	73	36.5	68.5
24-35	41	20.5	89
36-47	12	6	95
48-60	10	5	100
Total	200	100	
Level of education			
Reading and writing	34	17	17
Primary	46	23	40
Guidance and High School	56	28	68
Diploma and upper	64	32	100
Total	200	100	

**Table 2: Level of items of professional empowerment**

Items of professional empowerment*	1		2		3		4		5	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Individual factors	0	0	10	5	76	38	97	48.5	17	8.5
Communication and social factors	6	3	28	14	87	43.5	65	32.5	14	7
Institutional and structural factors	14	7	50	25	74	37	51	25.5	11	5.5
Managerial and financial factors	10	5	37	18.5	72	36	69	34.5	12	6

\*: 1=Very low, 2=Low, 3=Moderate, 4=High, 5=Very High

**Table 4: Relationship between professional empowerment and independent variables.**

Independent variable	Dependent variable	r	p
Level of entrepreneurship	Professional	0.617**	0.001
Land size	Empowerment	-0.064	0.370
Social participation		0.377**	0.001
Self esteem		0.389**	0.001
Individual autonomy		0.360**	0.001
Creativity		0.581**	0.001
Income		0.252**	0.001
Leadership		0.646**	0.001
Planning		0.530**	0.001
Job skills		0.534**	0.001
Age		-0.300**	0.001
Communication channels		0.635**	0.001
Number of household members		-0.346**	0.001
Social status		0.410**	0.001

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**Correlation and Regression Study**

Spearman correlation coefficients to test the hypotheses was used, the results of this test are as follows (Table 3):

There was a relationship between level of entrepreneurship, social participation, self esteem, individual autonomy, creativity, income, leadership, planning, job skills, age, communication channels, number of household members, social status and professional empowerment at % 99 levels.

Table 4 shows the result for regression analysis by stepwise method. Liner regression was used to predict changes in professional empowerment. Leadership, communication channels, job skills, social participation, planning, creativity and age may well explain for 70.4% changes ( $R^2 = 0.704$ ) in professional empowerment.

**Table 5: Multivariate regression analysis**

Independent variable	B	Beta	T	Sig
Leadership	4.290	0.687	13.37	0.000
Communication channels	1.490	0.409	8.567	0.000
Job skills	0.343	0.200	3.908	0.003
Social participation	0.718	0.142	3.488	0.000
Planning	0.636	0.166	3.114	0.002
Creativity	0.843	0.166	3.114	0.002
Age	-0.243	-0.109	-2.51	0.013
Constant	19.846	---	2.080	0.039

$R=0.839$   $R^2=0.704$   $R^2_{Adj}= 0.694$   $F=65.35$   $Sig F=0.000$

**Conclusion**

There was a relationship between level of entrepreneurship, social participation, self esteem, individual autonomy, creativity, income, leadership, planning, job skills, age, communication channels, and number of household members, social status and professional empowerment at % 99 levels. Liner regression was used to predict changes in professional empowerment. Leadership, communication channels, job skills, social participation, planning, creativity and age may well explain for 70.4% changes ( $R^2 = 0.704$ ) in professional empowerment. Based on the results the recommendations include:

- Providing conditions for the development of creativity and entrepreneurship improvement.
- Providing entrepreneurship training for rural women.
- Create a social and cultural environment for women to be able to feel safe in their participation in social activities.
- Holding meetings with the participation of rural women entrepreneurs and successful women farmers with other rural women.
- Organizing cultural and educational programs to enhance creativity, self-esteem, social status and leadership among rural women.
- Providing financial facilities for better access to resources.
- Training in the efficient use of available resources.

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