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Studying the factors associated with women's participation in family decision making (Case study: Northern Khorasan, Iran)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was the determining factors associated with women's participation in family decision making in married women in northern Khorasan province in Iran. The study statistical population included all married women in Northern Khorasan province in 2013 that their number is 190876. Due to the certain nature of the study population and different ethnicities, 389 subjects were selected according to Morgan table and Stratified sampling. For gathering data, women's participation in decision making questionnaire was used. Reliability of questionnaires after a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha test ($\alpha=0.81$) was obtained. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods for data analysis were used. The findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between access to resources and women participation in decision making. Also between women's socioeconomic status and women participation in decision making observed a positive relationship.

Keywords: women's participation, decision making, Northern Khorasan Province.

INTRODUCTION

Women and men are an essential resource of all nations and societies. Women have been playing a key role, not only in the improvement of family well being, but also in the development of the economical, political, and ecological environments. However the role and social status of women in the past were limited by tradition, law, religion, etc. Therefore, women have less opportunity to play their role in the society in comparison to men. The role of women and men in the relationship pattern of decision - making and division of labor in the family, are determined based on the gender status of men and women. The gender role is one of the important factors of interrelationship between husband and wife in the family. Women's fundamental role is a housewife who has to be responsible for house caring and child rearing [1]. The decision-making in family is one of the ways of the female empowerment. Participation in decision-making process in household matters considers that a female is accounted for in the family. In all societies, the issue of women's participation and how they participate economically, socially and culturally is considered to be important. Family decision-making has changed over the last several decades. Changing roles of women, increasing women's education, and increasing participation of women in the labor force are important keys for family decision-making changes [2].

In developing countries, women play a vital role to the welfare of the family. They are basically viewed as the potential mothers and homemakers. Hence, decision-making power of women within the family has been looked upon as one of the important factors which may effect on well-being of the family [3]. The importance of husband-wife decision making is well acknowledged by researchers [4]. It has been noted that women active participation at all levels of decision making is important in order to achieve equality and peace in family as well as the country.

Despite the importance women participation in family decision-making, in third world countries, women decision-making power is limited to some extent [5].

The fact that a woman's power to make decisions may differ across topics has been previously documented. It implies that while a woman may have considerable power on some dimensions of the family life, e.g., on decisions regarding child bearing, she may have at the same time very little power to decide what friends or relatives to visit, or how much money she can spend in the next day. Such situations suggest that the study of women's power requires one to identify the different spheres of power and to analyze them separately [6]. However, it is also useful to present a more general examination of what (or how much) power these women do have and, additionally, to predict what would be a wife's general level of power based on some individual, family and contextual variables. The studies about decision-making in family life show that males usually have power in economic resource. Males often decide how to manage the general financial affairs of the family. This is what determines the framework of many other aspects of family life. In an investigation about the males who have professional occupation and their wives, the decisions were divided into decisions which were very important and decisions which were considered to be important for both man and woman. A lot of very important decisions such as financial affairs were only made by husbands. Important decisions like children's education were often made by both. But women were just responsible for decisions which were considered to be unimportant and trivial by both husband and wife for instance, choosing the house interior decorations [2]. The influence of each member on decision-making depends on several factors such as the resources that each member contributes, which is the basis of the relative resource theory [7], culture which provides the basis for the theory of resources in a culture context [8], the degree of involvement and role specialization [9], the quality of the marital relationship [10], who has made decisions in the past [11], or the influence exerted by children [12].

Due to the importance of women decision-making, various studies have been conducted. Malkit (1998) conducted study on decision making power among women, related to social obligations, which include decisions regarding age at marriage, mate selection, dowry. Expenditure on marriage and education of children also showed relatively high role of women. Dowry was more or less a female domain with 78.3 per cent, women having high role in it, followed by decisions related to age at marriage of son or daughter [13]. Boonto (2008) in a study examined the power of Thai women in the family decisions. The result show that Married women can make their own important decision-making by themselves without consulting their husband, such as using contraception material when having sexual intercourse, keeping control of assets, controlling family expenditure, and the saving of money [1]. Sultana (2011) investigated factors effect on women autonomy and decision making power within the household in Bangladesh rural communities. The results showed that respondent's educational attainment, occupation and income were positively related to women decision-making power at household level [3]. The results of Kiani (2012) about women participation in Iran families showed that the duration of marriage life, age, and men's age of marriage have affected the women's family participation. The comparison of regression quotient shows that marriage duration has the most shares in dependent variable changes [2].

Today, the traditional family structure in Iran is changing. This restructuring has changed the role of the Iranian families. In Iran with the increase in women's education, change in occupation status and residential style which results in living in cities and new regions, the answer to the question of who makes decision in family can be completely different from the past because the status of women's family participations has changed compared to the past. Given the importance of women in family decisions, the aim of the present study was to investigate factors associated with women's participation in family decision making in Northern Khorasan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a correlation study. The study statistical population included all married women in Northern Khorasan province in 2013 that their number is 190876. Due to the certain nature of the study population and different ethnicities, 389 subjects were selected according to Morgan table and Stratified sampling. For collecting data, two questionnaires were used, demographic questionnaire and women's participation in decision making questionnaire. In this questionnaire, the rate of women's participation in home decision making and factors that affect it evaluated. This questionnaire developed by researcher with 57 questions that have closed answer. The content validity of the questionnaires was approved by five professors of women studies. Research reliability is determined by using the cronbach's alpha test, and the value is calculated for the women's participation in decision making ($\alpha=0.81$). For the pilot study, 30 questionnaires were distributed among married women then were collected and analyzed.

As to the statistical measures, descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and tabulations were used to describe the data. Inferential statistics including Pearson correlation formula was used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

The results showed that 58 percent of respondents have Diploma degree or less. Also average length of subjects' marriage was 14.9 years old.

Table1. Correlation Test of Hypothesis

Variables	Women participation in decision making		
	N	r	P
Access to resources	389	0.40	0.01
Period of marriage	389	-0.04	0.36
Women's socioeconomic status	389	0.36	0.00
Number of children	389	-0.01	0.09
Women age	389	0.26	0.03
Women responsibility	389	0.12	0.05
Women's perception of their role	389	0.23	0.00

Pearson correlation formula was run to examine the relationship between independent variables and women participation in decision making. Table 1 illustrates the results of Pearson correlation test. Regarding the results in table 1, there is a positive and significant relationship between access to resources and women participation in decision making. Also, the results of correlation coefficient show that there is no relationship between period of marriage and women participation in decision making. Between women's socioeconomic status and women participation in decision making there is a positive relationship. There is no relationship between number of children and women participation in decision making. The findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between women age and women participation in decision making. Also there is a positive and significant relationship between women responsibility and women participation in decision making. Finally there is a positive and significant relationship between women's perception of their role and women participation in decision making.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For the smooth running of a family, it is very important that equal status and equal power should be given to the basic constituents of family, i.e., man and woman so that they can rear up their children in a better way, and solve their day to day problems for achieving their desired goals. Women possess low decision-making power in their families. Women mainly possess familial decision-making power in control on unnatural abortions. Although education and occupation have increased among women, the traditional style of household chore division and decision-making are still dominant in the family, because according to Collins' approach, human beings live in the world created by themselves in which they have the power to influence or even control others' mental experience and try to dominate the people who are against them. Men also try to control women experiencing the participation in important family decision, based on that created world.

Women's access to resources, women's socioeconomic status, women age, women responsibility and women's perception of their role were positively related to their participation in family decision-making. Today's family structure is changing and these changes are also visible in the structure of Iranian families. Men have accepted that it is difficult to live without women's participation. Hence men delegated part of their decision-making power in the family to women. Delegating part of decision-making to the women at home can develop women responsibility. In this regards, following suggestions are offered:

- Roles of women and men in the family are well defined.
- Giving decision-making power to women in the family.
- Develop women and men participation in family decision-making.

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