

## Effective Factors in Social Participation of Females in the Contemporary Society of Iran

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to investigate the factors which affect females' social participation in the contemporary society of Iran (Ardabil province). The population of this study included women above 18, in 2010. The participants were chosen by using cluster sampling. The questionnaires were distributed randomly among 409 women. This study was of survey type. The results showed that the mean of civil participation of females was the lowest and the mean of their religious participation was the highest. The order of females' participation level from high to low was: 1- religious participation 2- revolutionary participation 3- cultural-recreational participation 4- local participation 5- supportive participation 6- civil participation. According to the findings, the mean of social participation of females was of relatively low level. Additionally their participations revolved around traditional participation. In this study social participation was a function of activity condition, occupational group, years of service, work experience and monthly income. Furthermore the level of self-efficacy and self-confidence, political awareness, access to media and the amount of meeting women's expectations from society were factors which promoted the level of their social participation.

**Key words:** Participation • Society • Development • Females • Occupation • Group

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### INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of social personality and citizenship depends on participation and stepping beyond the circle of personal and private affairs. In other words, there is an intense bidirectional interaction between participation and acquisition of social personality. On the one hand, participation is the basic component in improvement of quality of life, on the other hand it is considered as the instrument and the goal of development. Women as a part of work force and active population of every society are one of the potential participatory forces and main factors in production. They make up approximately moiety of population in every society. Thus it is important on the one hand, to take their social and political rights into consideration and on the other hand, to find some ways for realization and establishment of those rights and create objective situations for flourishing potential and hidden talents and take advantage of their key role in historical campaigns as a sector of society [1]. The size of participation and role of women in a country can be referred as one of the indicators of a developed country. Participation of women in society has direct relationships with social welfare and the increase of per capita income.

To the same extent, non- exploitation of females' potential force in cultural, social, economic and political grounds makes accomplishment of balanced and stable development impossible. From long time ago up to the present time, because of conventions and traditional stereotypes of societies, the roles of females have been limited to motherhood and being wife; and acceptance of occupational responsibility out of home, has been conditioned to simultaneous fulfillment of this responsibility along with the responsibility of house holding [2]. It is due to such an attitude that women have not easy access to professions out of home. And their works are limited to merely a handful of professions which the social conventions confirm them. Besides, their factitious fears have impeded their further activity [3]. The attitudes of women toward the problems of social participation emanate from the roles and the duties assigned to them as well as the expectations of the society from them. The attitudes of females toward social participation can originate from their social position, education, years of services, experience and amount of income [4]. The study of development approaches such as humane development and stable development, without corporate participation of men and women is not only

impossible but also participation is considered as one of their principles, tools and goals [5]. In the current study regarding the significance of the issue and the key role of females in social, cultural and economical development of society, some effective factors on raising the level of females' social activities have been examined. Relationship among social participation of females and other variables like the level of education, major of study, amount of income, years of service, occupational status, political awareness of females and their expectations from society, is the main objective of this study.

**The Significance of Study:** Women have a fundamental role in social, cultural and economic development of society and any change for development needs taking their potential and actual energies into consideration. Therefore, the amount of men and women's active participation and the amount of providing the both genders with service are among the criteria of sustainable development. The active participation of women is essential in any society according to the society's culture. Principally, any developmental program in social, cultural, humanistic and economic levels should be started from women, because in the majority of third-world countries, women are considered as a particular and very poor group. The women who work hard in and out of home are not new phenomenon. In the underdeveloped countries, in agricultural societies, women not only are obliged to manage the home and family, but also work several hours in the farms [6]. Consequently, some criteria should be established that women will enjoy its benefits definitely. In fact women comprise the half of the world population. Bringing women into focus is not only affected by a powerful international move and but also is influenced by the internal demands and needs of third-world societies. Consequently, any developmental program which does not concentrate on women will not be successful.

**Concepts and Variables under Study:** Among the most important factors affecting the social participation of women, we can point to education, individual traits, religious beliefs, being urban or rural, social class, occupational status and local connections. The amount of women's social participation is the dependant variable and education, occupational status, political awareness, meeting women's expectations, major of study, amount of income and years of service are the independent variables in this research.

**Participation and Social Participation:** Participation means applying personal resources to take part in a collective action [7]. Oakley believes that participation is the sensitization of people and ultimately, raising their capability of being responsible for the developmental programs by getting them involved in decision making, performing and evaluating the programs based on the organized measures [8]. Social participation generally involves the individual and collective inclinations toward having a hand in determining their fate and the society's and affecting the decision making processes. In this study, social participation of women has been considered as their voluntary participation in different elections, charities, attending in national and religious programs and ceremonies, Friday Prayer (Namaz Jomé) and religious meetings, going to art meetings, participation in public sports and training courses, participation in art, cultural and family competitions, membership in cooperative associations and activities, membership in libraries, membership in parent-teacher association, having contact with media and the amount of using mass media.

**Hypotheses:** 1) There is a relationship between women's level of education and their social participation 2). The amount of social participation is different in women with different majors 3). There is a relationship between women's monthly income and their social participation 4). There is a relationship between women's years of service and their social participation 5). The amount of social participation in employed and unemployed women is different 6). There is a relation between women's political awareness and their social participation 7). There is a relationship between meeting women's expectation and their social participation 8). There is a relationship between women's age and their social participation 9). The amount of social participation is different in married women 10). The amount of women's social participation is different according to their dwelling place 11). Women's religious belief affects their social participation 12). Stereotyped conventions and traditions affect women's social participation 13). There is a relationship between women's occupational group and their social participation.

**Theories:** Tavassoli (2003) in "Social participation in an anomalous condition", has tied the participation debate to social anomie and deviations and has identified the social harms and deviations in society as the result of social participation's absence. In "The cultural conflict between

government and nation of Iran”, Malekpoor (1982), another theorist in the domain of social issues, has studied participation with regard to social trust [9]. Bashirie (2003) in “Political obstacles in Iran” has discussed participation with regard to political development. He believes that the purpose of political development is to increase participation and competition of social groups in the political life [9]. Philosophers like: Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Mill not only identify a certain position for women in society, but also they usually consider them different from men and relate this difference to their innate instincts such as breeding and the child’s bringing up [10].

**Structural-Functionalistic Perspectives:** In this pattern, society is considered as an interrelated system, made of congruous elements which continually preserves its domain and is in a constant balance and equilibrium. The theories of structural-functionalism about participation can be classified into three theoretic patterns: a) modernization pattern and political participation approach, b) theories of the woman in the development and c) traditional views about the woman [1].

**Modernization Pattern and Political Participation:** The structural-functionalistic concept of participation in general and political participation in particular, can be propounded on the socio-economic, political and mental levels and in the framework of modernization, which in turn identifies the impediments of participation. The concept of participation culture has been discussed extensively in Parsons’ social action and participation culture theory [11]. According to social action theory, personality is the consequence of the internalization of those positions that an individual have played role in it [12]. Hoselitz in structural-functionalism theory, by applying Parsons’ pattern variables, believes that pattern variables in developed countries are characterized by traits such as universalism, acquired orientation and separation of functions. While in the third-world countries, they are specified by features like particularism, appointed orientation and intervention of functions [1]. In Eisenstadt’s modernization theory, traditional societies are considered as limited and surrounded societies. Conversely, modern societies are regarded as expanded and compatible societies with various internal and external conditions. Eisenstadt has regarded the tendency to development of participation as one of the modern societies’ characteristics [1]. Almond, Verba and Powel, in

their participation theory, have emphasized the role of individuals’ self-reliance in modernism and participation [1]. Ingehart in cultural modernization and participation, by studying social and cultural modernization in western societies, has attributed participation incline in those societies to three factors: promotion of education and political awareness levels, changing the norms and customs dominating women’s participation and replacing those value priorities that put less emphasis on the immediate natural needs with those that lay more emphasis on the expression of opinions right [1].

**Theories of "The Woman in Development:** This viewpoint, regarding the woman's role in the development, concentrates mainly on the equality of men and women’s social and economic rights principle and especially emphasizes wages equalization, economic discriminations removal and particularly poverty eradication in women. Mentioned theories about this point of view include: Liberalistic Theory, Neoclassical Theory, Equality and Justice Theory and Poverty Eradication Theory. In Liberalistic Theory, the majority of sociologists do not accept the views of Freud’s adherents on determining men and women’s characteristics by innate-biological instincts. The behavioral characteristics of men and women are not recognized by inheritance and genetic factors, however, these characteristics exist under social and cultural conditions [1]. In Neoclassical Theory, of which the most economists are in favor, economic growth, free market and non-intervention of government have been discussed [13]. In fact the theory of "women in development" is the same as the theory of "equality and justice". According to this theory, women are active participants in the development process and have a crucial and often anonymous role in their country's economic growth by their productive, breeding, bringing up and taking care of humane force roles [1]. Poverty Eradication Theory can be characterized as the most important theory about "women in development" in which economic inequality between men and women is not attributed to women's lower position, on the contrary, it is identified as a result of poverty [1].

**Traditional Views about the Woman:** These views relate to the segregation of roles, responsibilities and functions of social individuals, groups and institutions and concentrate on the difference between men and women regarding social, inheritance, genetic, biological aspects. Freud's traditional psychology and Parsons' functionalism

are included in these views [1]. According to Parsons' functionalism, women have the emotional role in the family. They are obedient, cheerful, kind and sentimental. On the other hand, men should have the breadwinner role. Men are aggressive, leader, problem solver and creative. They support family financially by earning. Freud adopting functionalistic and traditional psychological perspective expressed that middle-class women in 19<sup>th</sup> century were jealous of men. It sounds that Freud could never understand that women had a good reason to envy men. He completely forgot the social variables such as lack of power compared to men [1]. In theories of inequality which are inspired from the conflict approach, unequal distribution of power and ownership, elitism and professionalism could be considered as the main participation obstacles [14]. Feminism is a view which appeared for the analysis of women's problems and difficulties. By presenting perspectives about women, this view provides novel capabilities for social thought and act. According to feminists, ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining social relations of dominance and dependence and through variety of way, attempts to distort and undervalue women's productive activities [1]. Kelly and Brein Linger, from the social psychology perspective, find participation as a sort of collective action. They believe that the connection among personality traits, power of controlling, political influence and individualism-collectivism orientation, in relation to participation in collective action, should be investigated according to people's social position [1]. Self-efficacy, in its psychological definition, is the perceived expectations of an individual, her success in a job, or achievement of a satisfactory outcome through individual activities [1]. In "Personality type and participation", Riesman (1950) has pointed to three types of personalities in the modern world: tradition-directed, inner-directed and other-directed. Riesman believes that the highest amount of participation lies in the second type of personality i.e. inner-directed type [1]. In the theory of self-reliance and participation and about the role of self-reliance and feeling of power in promotion of individual's social and political participation, Robert H. Coombs (1969), by presenting a cyclic pattern, has examined the interaction between self-efficacy and social and political participation and has identified self-efficacy as the cause of social and political participation [1]. Gaotri, the theorist of combined/integrative approaches to participation, believes that participation is a process of social and civil self-teaching, because attempt for participation needs the change of

mental state on every level. Moreover, David Sills emphasizes the crucial role of social forces, personality differences and social environments including social institutions and organizations, cultural and political beliefs and values and beliefs pattern in participation [1].

#### **The Background of Participation and Females' Participation:**

The modernization process which started from 15<sup>th</sup> century and gradually extended across the world, brought about deep changes in all dimensions of human thought and life, including economic, political and cultural changes. The tendency toward more extensive participation of people along with their political awareness raising and more application of social forces appeared in this era and its climax was in the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries [9]. Nevertheless, in relation to political participation, women have never been completely unaware of political power. However, in most western countries, when women were allowed to vote for the first time, the less number of women, in comparison with men, voted. In 1929, in the first national election in which women in Britain could vote, just one-third of women voted, while two-third of men did vote [15].

#### **Women and the Constitution Movement in Iran (Before the Islamic Revolution):**

Constitution movement of Iran was one of the biggest anti-oppression movements in early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Middle East. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, two important revolutions took place in Iran: Constitutional Revolution in 1902 and Islamic Revolution in 1979, that women had a major part in the both revolutions. In the pre-Constitution period, in Gajar age, women did not have any crucial roles in the country's social and political affairs. It was at the threshold of Constitution that cultural and political evolution appeared in the society [16]. During the Constitution, women's activities developed in three areas: educational activity (foundation of schools), social activity (publications) and political activity (establishment of political associations).

#### **The Issue's Background in Iran (After the Islamic Revolution)**

##### **Examining the Social Factors Which Affected the Level of Political Participation of Tabriz University's Students:**

The findings obtained from the bi-variate analysis of data in the study of Dianatizade (2003) showed that there were significant relationships among political participation

and the variables of voluntary membership in associations, political friends, political family, political awareness, open political climate and mass media. In other words, these variables had remarkable effect on political participation [9].

#### **Manifestation of Social Participation Impediments in**

**Kashan:** Niazi (2001) specified the recognition of social participation's obstacles in Kashan as the basic issue in his study. In this study, relying on the integrative approach, the effects of structural factors at a macro level and the effects of medial processes and individual factors, at a micro level have been examined on the social participation phenomenon. The collected data and the related statistical tests on variables and hypotheses of the research were corroborator of the predicted relationships in the hypotheses and confirmed the relationships among the variables [9].

#### **The Relationship Between Family Background of**

**Tehran University's Students and Their Social Participation:** Anbari's study (1998) revealed the socio-economic position of students affected their social participation. [17].

- The findings of a research (1999) titled as "The investigation of effective factors in employed women's social participation in Bushehr", indicated that the variables of: the amount of women's access to the media and the level of their awareness of their rights had a significant relationship with women's social participation [17].
- "Investigation of women's attitude towards social participation" by Arefi (2004) was a case study in Azarbayjan-e-Gharbi. In this research, the women's attitude toward participation only had a statistically significant relationship with the variable of major and the other variables did not have much effect on their attitudes [4].

**The Issue's Background in the World:** The first experimental research in this field was conducted by P. Lazarsfeld, using survey method. In "People's choice", he did investigations on the intentions of American voters living in Erie County and Ohio during the presidential campaigns in 1940 and confirmed the hypothesis that the events happened for the voters in their own society were more influential than the other global issues on their thought. Moreover, he notifies that advertisements have much less effect than public attitudes and culture on people's election acts. In addition to Lazarsfeld, a large

number of experts have conducted researches on political and election participation, for instance: M. Lipset (1960), D. Lerner (1964), J. Nye (1967), M. Weiner (1974), R. A. Dahl (1985), S. Huntington (1989), L. Milbrath, Seydney and Verba [9].

### **METHOD AND MATERIALS**

**Participants:** the statistical population of this study comprised females over 18 who were inhabitants of Ardabil province, totally 456973 in 2009 [18].

**Sample Size and the Method of Sampling:** Considering sampling domain, simple random sampling was used in Ardabil province. Among the cities of the province, three cities were chosen (Meshgin Shahr, Pars Abad and Ardabil). The participants were chosen using cluster sampling. Then the questionnaires were distributed randomly among 409 women of those areas. Employing Cerjeci-Morgan table, 398 women were selected as statistical sample. However, in order to improve external validity of the study, regarding the probability of non-return of some of the questionnaires, 409 questionnaires were distributed among the females and collected after completion.

#### **Instruments of Data Collection and Their Psychometric Characteristics (Validity and Reliability):**

With regard to the aim of the study and the large statistical population, the questionnaire and individual interview were identified as the most appropriate ways of measurement for the study. In this questionnaire 40 closed items related to independent variable and dependent variables were developed. The content validity of instrument (questionnaire) was determined. For evaluating its reliability item inter-correlation was used. In order to assess the reliability of the developed questionnaire, 26 women were chosen to complete it. Cronbach's alpha for social participation questionnaire was  $\alpha = 0.87$ .

**Method of Data Collection:** Data were collected from respondents either in group at their work places or their educational environments, or individually at their homes or clubs by using social participation questionnaire including 40 closed items. Questionnaires were analyzed statistically in different stages. Design of the study was survey which is one the descriptive methods of research. The purpose of study was to examine the effective factors which promote social participation of females in Ardabil province.

### **The Statistical Instruments for Analysis of the Data:**

The questionnaires were analyzed after completion. The analysis of the data was run by using statistical techniques such as frequency percentage, chi square, Spearman's rank order correlation, one-way ANOVA, t-test as they are represented in the following: Hypotheses 3,4,6,7,8,13 were analyzed, using spearman's correlation. Hypotheses 2,9,10 were analyzed by one-way ANOVA. Hypothesis 5 was analyzed through Chi square.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the current study indicated that:

- The amount of social participation of females was not related to the type of their field of study, marital status and dwelling place.
- There was a positive and significant relationship between the mean of each of these factors: monthly income, level of education, years of service, occupational group, political awareness, meeting expectation of females and social participation of females.
- The stereotyped conventions and traditions of the society had a significant influence on the social participation of females, coordinately the findings of the current study demonstrated that stereotyped conventions and traditions of the society didn't prevent social participation of females.
- There was no significant difference between the social participation of employed and unemployed females. It means that employed and unemployed women were not different in terms of social participation.
- The religious beliefs affected social participation of females significantly, that is, their religious beliefs didn't prevent them from social participation.
- Their response to the item about the satisfaction with work environment showed that the majority of females were not satisfied with their work environment. And it could be one of the obstacles in social activities of women.
- The females' responses to the item related to the size of their interest in collective activities, indicated that they were not interested in collective activities, it was due to lack of facilities in society.
- The answers to the item related to the amount of women's influence on decision making showed the most of females' claim about their influence on decisions of family.
- The answers of women to the question which was about the amount of their participation in public sports, displayed that most of women had never participated in public sports or scarcely had.
- Approximately half of the women read newspapers, journals, periodicals ...
- It was detected that most of females had no participation in scientific, cultural and art competitions.
- The responses to the item which was related to the amount of females' contact with mass media (e.g., TV, Radio...) disclosed that the bulk of women had contact with mass media.
- The question about the amount of females' participation in religious ceremonies (religious participation), replied by women, showed that the majority of the women took part in such religious ceremonies (e.g., Roze, reading Quran, Sofre...), which this result complied with the outcomes of a prior study [19].
- Approximately half of the females stated that they were aware of their family rights.
- The majority of students declared that they had small amount of knowledge about their civil rights.
- About the amount of females' participation in elections, it was found that most of women participated in different elections. It indicated high social participation of women on this ground.
- The greatest number of women took part in the friendly and informal gatherings and the activities which were related to art, sport and culture.
- Supportive participation of more than half of the women was of low level, it means that they were not active in terms of supporting women, children, the elderly, social... and prisoners' rights and didn't belong to any supportive organizations.
- The answers of the women to the item which was about the amount of their local participation, indicated that the bulk of women had great cooperation with their neighbors, in the programs of local mosque, teacher-parent association, supporting poor people, etc.
- Related to civil participation of females, it was recognized that the majority of women did not belong to parties and political groups, clubs, associates, non-state organizations, companies and guilds.
- The level of females' revolutionary participation i.e. their participation in demonstrations, Friday prayer (Namaz Jome), collective prayer (Namaz Jamaat), ceremonies, speeches and Basij bases was of high level.

- About half of the women said that they were members of libraries in their cities, workplaces...
- Most of women stated that they had not been members of any sport team.
- The size of their membership in teacher-parent association was of low level.
- Only less than half of the females expressed that they had been in cinema or theater.
- The responses to the item which was about the amount of women's participation in different training courses showed that the majority of women attended such training courses.
- The answers to the item about the level of women's participation in figurative climate or cybernetic system made clear that less than half of the women were active in this field i.e. lower percentage of females were active in figurative climate.
- About half of the women stated that they participated in competitions related to science, sport and art. According to findings of the current study, approximately half of the women have got their bachelor's degree in humanities. Besides, the majority of them had few years of service and resided in small cities. Moreover almost half of them were married.
- The average income of more than half of the participants and occupational rank of nearly half of them were very low. Furthermore it was found that the half of the women is financially supported by their parents and the other half is employed.

In the current study the major impediments of females' social participations, are stated as facilities shortage, non-access to resources and traditional, conventional, cultural and family obstacles, unawareness of females and lack of self-confidence.

According to the findings of the present study, the mean of civil participation (membership and activity in non-state organization, parties, clubs and associations, guilds, cooperative companies, etc.) of women is very lower than other types of participation. The mean of their religious participation (e.g., participation in religious gathering, Roze, Sofre, reading Quran ceremonies, religious celebrations, religious lamentations, charities...) is far more than other types of participation. The amount of females' participation in different types of participation from high to low is presented as follows: 1- religious participation 2- revolutionary participation 3- cultural-recreational participation 4- local participation 5- supportive participation 6- civil participation.

According to the outcomes of the present study the total average of social participation of the females in Ardabil province is lower than 50 percent i.e. social participation of the females in Ardabil province is relatively of low level. Social participation of the females concentrates on the traditional participations and it has been existed from many years ago on the basis of culture of Iranian society. As the further analysis of the main findings of the research indicates females of Ardabil province have not left behind the traditional stage to reach modernization, in other words they are at the first steps of this process.

At the present time social participation is a function of activity condition, occupational group, years of service, work experience and monthly income. Furthermore the level of self-efficacy and self-confidence, political awareness, access to media and the amount of meeting women's expectations from society are factors which promote the level of their social participation.

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