

## **Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital and Empowerment Among Squatter Settlements in Tehran, Iran**

*Hamidreza Babaei, Nobaya Ahmad and Sarjit S. Gill*

Department of Social and Development Science,  
Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine the effect of bonding, bridging and linking social capital on the empowerment among squatter settlements in Tehran, Iran. The sample comprised 328 poor people in two communities from Iran, which were randomly selected for the study. A self-administered questionnaire was used as the data collection method. The perceived bonding, bridging and linking social capital was measured by the trust and relationship with family and close friends and with colleagues, neighborhood people and society people as well as with the ethnic group and governmental and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the perceived empowerment was measured by summing the scores of psychological and financial assets. The results revealed the significant effect of bonding, bridging and linking social capital on empowerment among squatter settlements. Bonding social capital had the largest beta coefficient compared to other dimensions, such as bridging and linking social capital.

**Key words:** Bonding Social Capital • Bridging Social Capital • Linking Social Capital • Empowerment • Squatter Settlements • Tehran • Iran

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The growth of urban squatter settlements is a major problem in developing countries [1]. In 1999, the population of the world reached 6 billion people, of which about 47% lived in urban areas. By 2020, it is estimated that 57% of the world's population will be living in urban areas [2]. In Asia, about 38% of the population is living in urban areas. It is estimated that the rate will increase to more than 50% by 2015 and that there will be a doubling of urban population before 2025 [2]. According to UN-Habitat [3], almost 1 billion people, or 32 percent of the world's urban population, live in slums.

In fact, during the last 40 years, a new phenomenon has appeared in Tehran, which is relatively irregular; that is, an explosive increase in the rural population of Tehran province with 7.5 percent growth rate. The fundamental point is that the migrants have been driven to the rural areas of Tehran province or around Tehran. In Iran, it is estimated that currently about one eighth (1/8) of the total urban population of the country-about 5 million people-live in informal settlements. According to Collier [4], people living in situations of poverty have a lower cost of

opportunity and less financial and human capital than wealthy people.

Empowerment has become an important tool for enabling marginalized individuals to gain access to resources and to value their own experience [5-8]. According to Narayan [9], empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. In the recent decade, the concepts of empowerment and social capital have entered the discourse on development in an important way [10]. The World Bank Groups indicated that social capital is necessary for long-term development and that it is the capital of the poor [11]. Social capital, in its best form, contributes to economic, social and political development by enabling information sharing, mitigating opportunistic behavior and facilitating collective decision-making [12]. The institutions, networks and norms that comprise social capital thus contribute directly to empowerment at the local level and, indirectly, by facilitating a number of processes that make state institutions more responsive to the poor [10]. Social capital is providing a bottom-up approach to poverty alleviation [13].

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**Corresponding Author:** Nobaya Ahmad, Associate Professor / Deputy Dean (Academic and International),  
Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Tel: +6038946-7069.

To empower the poor settlements, it is necessary to understand whether there is a significant relationship between social capital and empowerment. However, there is need to understand which dimensions of social capital predict empowerment effectively. In fact, the main question in this research is whether a significant relationship exists between social capital and empowerment among squatter settlements in Iran.

**Hypothesis:** By increasing the level of social capital the level of empowerment increases significantly among squatter settlements.

- Increasing the level of bonding social capital significantly increases the level of empowerment among squatter settlements.
- Increasing the level of bridging social capital significantly increases the level of empowerment among squatter settlements.
- Increasing the level of linking social capital significantly increases the level of empowerment among squatter settlements.

**Empowerment:** Empowerment is an abstract, multi-dimensional and multi-level concept that can be both a process and outcome [14, 15]. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group and the community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Alsop and Heinsohn [16] define empowerment as the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. This definition demonstrates how empowerment is not just a financial term, but also one with serious political implications.

According to McWhirter [17], empowerment has often been stated as a goal of counseling interventions. By definition, empowerment is an ongoing social action process by which individuals, communities and organizations that lack an equitable share of power and valuable resources, gain increased access to resources, along with a simultaneous increase in funds of knowledge. These gains result in individuals possessing greater control over their lives, which leads to improved equity and life opportunities [18]. Research has also stated that once individuals become empowered they will come to understand how power is distributed within society. With this understanding, research states that individuals will recognize how they and their communities

are affected by the distribution of power. Lastly, research has also stated that empowerment helps individuals recognize and understand how they have come to occupy their social standing in society.

**Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital:** The concepts of bonding, bridging and linking social capital have proven useful in characterizing the multiple dimensions of social identities and relations at the community level [19-23]. The bonding and bridging terms, first introduced by Gittel and Vidal [19], are similar in meaning to Granovetter's [24] strong and weak ties and can also be understood as a fuller specification of Woolcock's [13] concept of integration. Linking social capital likely derives from the term "linkage" in Woolcock's [13] framework. Discussions of bonding, bridging and linking social capital emphasize that each form is useful for meeting different needs and has particular advantages and disadvantages [25-27]. Bonding social capital refers to strong, dense ties between people who know each other well, such as family members, close friends, neighbors and members of primary groups [12, 19, 23, 28]. Bonding connects individuals who are similar in terms of socio-financial position and demographic characteristics; groups defined by these relations thus have a high degree of homogeneity [11, 26, 28, 29]. Multiple roles of bonding social capital are recognized in the literature: creation of shared identities and personal reputation; development of local reciprocity and particularized trust; and provision of emotional closeness, social support and crisis aid [19, 20, 30]. Such ties engender a high level of solidarity within the group structure, which can effectively mobilize individuals and resources around a common purpose [20, 21, 31]. Bonding social capital (e.g., family structures) is also considered a foundation from which to establish bridging and linking ties to other groups [22, 27]. Notwithstanding the numerous positive functions of bonding, most discussions also draw attention to its potential negative aspects. The various downsides of social capital noted by Portes and Landolt [32] and Portes [33] (i.e., harm to individuals within the group, exclusion of outsiders and other negative externalities) are generally associated with bonding social capital [20, 23, 26]. The most perverse (anti-social) outcomes of social capital are attributed to bonding taken to extremes, especially in the absence of bridging relations [20, 26, 29].

Bridging social capital implies looser ties between people who are not alike demographically, but have broadly similar financial status and power [20, 25].

Bridging, in this sense, is a metaphor for horizontal connections that span different social groups or communities [25]. Whereas bonding social capital is restrictive to outsiders, bridging ties are inclusive, cutting across ethnicity, caste, race, culture and other social cleavages [21, 23, 34]. Bridging relations typically include casual friends, work colleagues and members of secondary associations [20, 25]. The openness towards different types of people that is characteristic of this form of social capital is thought to reflect generalized trust [30]. In bringing together individuals who are not alike, bridging social capital tends to inculcate broader identities and more generalized forms of reciprocity than occurs through bonding relations [20, 26]. The main utility of bridging ties is access to a larger pool of resources, information and opportunities than is available within the group [19, 20, 22]. In contrast to bonding social capital, bridging is equated with positive outcomes and low potential for negative externalities [20, 26, 29]. As Putnam [29] puts it, bonding social capital is useful for "getting by," but bridging social capital is crucial for "getting ahead". For Putnam, "getting ahead" means groups and communities leveraging their more extensive social relations to achieve collective objectives, such as financial development. Negative externalities are assumed to be unlikely because of the moderating influence of crosscutting ties [20, 26, 29]. Bridging social capital may have limitations; however, such as a lack of resources in some groups with which to exchange [23] or a problem of resource redundancy since, by definition, the various groups have more or less equivalent financial position and power. The third category of community-level social capital consists of linking ties between groups and people in positions of authority or influence [11, 25]. Whereas bonding and bridging refer to basically horizontal relationships, linking social capital represents the vertical dimension [25, 27]. Linking ties may include civil society organizations (NGOs, voluntary groups), government agencies (service providers, the police), representatives of the public (elected politicians, political parties) and the private sector (banks, employers) [21]. This form of social capital is valuable in terms of increased access to key resources from formal institutions outside the community (e.g., financial and technical support, capacity-building and increased access to formal decision-making processes) [11, 22, 25, 35].

Proponents of social capital, such as the World Bank, maintain that linking relations can encapsulate ideas of power and resource differentials in society, not only between communities and the state but also between

communities and non-state actors. According to this view, linking social capital is deemed essential for the well-being and long-term development of poor and marginalized groups [25, 27, 28]. Although, generally speaking, the literature equates linking social capital with positive outcomes for communities, the adequacy of the social capital concept to address issues of power and conflict is contested. Fine [36] and Harriss [37] argued that most accounts of social capital neglect the historical-political context and implicitly accept existing power structures. Harriss [37], moreover, suggested that the overriding emphasis in social capital literature on cooperation and privileging of associational life (as in Putnam's conceptualization) obscures the potentially constructive roles that political action and conflict can play in social change. My own view is that the social capital framework does not preclude consideration of power and resource differentials; the concept of linking social capital can be used to explain such asymmetries as well as the sharing of power and resources. Different combinations of the three types of community-level social capital are thought to produce a range of outcomes [25, 26], paralleling the argument made about the micro-and macro-forms of social capital in Woolcock's [13] integrated model. Once again, more community-level social capital is not necessarily better; over-reliance on bonding or bridging, for instance, can be detrimental because benefits are confined to one type of social capital at the expense of the other [27]. Similar to Woolcock's model, the conceptualization of community-level social capital is dynamic rather than static. The optimal combination of bonding, bridging and linking social capital can vary over time as the needs and priorities of the community evolves or as the macro-environment itself changes [13, 38].

### **Measurement**

**Empowerment:** Combining financial and psychological assets was used for the measuring empowerment. According to Alsop and Heinsohn [16], financial empowerment has six dimensions; employment history, level of indebtedness, sources of credit, household expenditure, food expenditure and occupation. This study selected these six dimensions for measuring financial empowerment. In addition, psychological empowerment is defined as an individual's experience of intrinsic motivation that is based on the cognition about him/her in relation to his or her work role [39]. According to Alsop and Heinsohn [16], psychological empowerment has three dimensions-self-perceived exclusion from community

Table 1: Physiological and Financial Assets Indicators and Instruments

Asset base	Indicator	Instruments
Psychological Assets	Self-perceived exclusion from community activities	IQMSC-section 5
	Level of interaction/sociability with people from different social groups	IQMSC-section 5
	Capacity to envisage change, to aspire	IQMSC-section 6
Financial Assets	Employment history	LSMS-economic activities module
	Level of indebtedness	LSMS-economic activities module
	Sources of credit	LSMS-economic activities module
	Household expenses	LSMS-housing module
	Food expenditure	LSMS-food expenditures module
	Occupation	SCAT-Household Questionnaire section 2

activities, level of interaction/sociability with people from different social groups and capacity to envisage change, to aspire. Table 1, shows the measuring physiological and financial assets indicators and instruments.

**Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital:** To measure bonding, bridging and linking social capital an instrument including 29-items was adopted from Grootaert, Narayan, Jones and Woolcock [40] “Measuring Social Capital; An Integrated Questionnaire of World Bank” and using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (strongly agree). Bonding social capital in this study is defined as an individual’s perception and behavioral of the trust and relationship with family and close friends. Bonding social capital impacts were measured by the 6-items. In this study, bridging social capital is an individual’s perception and behavioral of the trust and relationship with colleague and neighborhood people and society people and were measured by the 11-items. Linking social capital in this study is an individual’s perception and behavioral of the trust and relationship with the ethnic group and governmental organization and non-governmental organization. Linking social capital impacts were measured by the 12-items.

**Sample and Data Collection:** The research instrument has verified adequate levels of internal consistency, reliability and content validity according to past research. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select the community and the convenience sampling method was used to select individual respondents who were between 25 and 75 years. However, this study used the survey technique and questionnaires to collect the data from 328 selected respondents in two squatter settlement communities in Tehran (Islamabad and Bagh-e-Azari).

## RESULTS

As depicted in Table 2, a relationship between bonding social capital ( $M=19.61, SD=8.86, r= .421, N=328, p < 0.01$ ), bridging social capital ( $M=18.26, SD=9.29, r = .397, N=328, p < 0.01$ ) and linking social capital ( $M=14.10, SD=4.72, r = .284, N=328, p < 0.01$ ) with empowerment was found to exist. Correlation analysis showed that the bonding social capital has a stronger linear relationship than bridging and linking social capital. Therefore, the findings showed that there was a significant relationship between social capital dimensions and empowerment among squatter settlement people. However, for this hypothesis to analyze the relationship between bonding, bridging, linking social capital and empowerment, regression analysis was employed.

Table 3, shows that there is a significant relationship between social capital dimensions (bonding, bridging, linking) and empowerment ( $R^2 = .195, F(3, 324) = 26.160, P = .000$ ). The  $R^2$  value of 0.195 implies that the three aforementioned predictors explain around 20% of variance/variation in the empowerment.

However, Table 4, the significant F value, [ $F(3, 324) = 26.160, P < .001$ ] indicates that a significant relationship exists between the weighted liner composite of the independent variables, as specified by the model and the dependent variable.

As depicted in Table 5, the Sig (p) for each independent variable represents a measure of the significance of this variable in predicting the independent variables. For the first independent variable (bonding social capital), the test was statistically significant ( $t = 7.738, Beta = .394; p = .001$ ). This suggested that bonding social capital was the significant predictor of empowerment among squatter settlements in Tehran. For the second independent variable (bridging social capital), the test was statistically

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Social Capital Dimensions and Empowerment

	Empowerment	Bonding Social Capital	Bridging Social Capital	Linking Social Capital
Empowerment	1			
Bonding Social Capital	.421***	1		
Bridging Social Capital	.397***	.477***	1	
Linking Social Capital	.284***	.205***	.540***	1

\*\*\* p< 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: Standard Regression Model Summary

Adjusted				Change Statistics				
R	R2	R2	Std. Error of the Estimate	R2 Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.442a	.195	.188	10.53402	.195	26.160	3	324	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Linking Social Capital, Bonding Social Capital, Bridging Social Capital

b. Dependent Variable: Empowerment

Table 4: ANOVA: Regression Significance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	8708.680	3	2902.893	26.160	.000a
Residual	35952.881	324	110.966		
Total	44661.561	327			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Linking Social Capital, Bonding Social Capital, Bridging Social Capital

b. Dependent Variable: Empowerment

Table 5: Estimates of the Coefficients for the Model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	24.382	2.029		12.015	.000
Bonding Social Capital	.975	.126	.394	7.738	.000
Bridging Social Capital	.423	.069	.321	6.120	.000
Linking Social Capital	.294	.068	.234	4.345	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Empowerment

significant (t = 6.120, Beta = .321; p = .001). This suggested that bonding social capital was the significant predictor of empowerment among squatter settlements in Tehran. For the third independent variable (linking social capital), the test was not statistically significant (t = 4.345, Beta = .234; p = .001). This suggested that linking social capital was a statistically significant predictor of empowerment.

However, the largest beta coefficient belonged to the bonding social capital dimension ( $\beta = 0.394$ ), which means that this variable makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the empowerment. Table 5 shows that linking social capital has a lower beta ( $\beta = 0.234$ ) than bonding and bridging social capital. Results depicted in Table 5, the estimated equation for analysis is:  $Y$  (empowerment) = 24.38 + .394 (bonding social capital) X1 + .321 (bridging social capital) X2 + .234 (linking social capital) X3.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in the present research, bonding social capital has a strong and positive significant effect on empowerment. The findings indicated that by increasing the level of bonding social capital, the level of empowerment significantly improves ties between people who know each other well, such as family members, close friends and neighbors. Furthermore, the findings indicated that bridging social capital, which refers to the looser ties between people who are not alike demographically, but have broadly similar economic status and power, increases empowerment. However, the effect of bridging social capital on empowerment is not as strong as bonding social capital. Finally, linking social capital showed a significant effect on empowerment. Linking social capital had a weak effect on empowerment. These findings are consistent with the results of Putnam

[20, 29] Henly *et al.* [41], Woolcock [38], Harknett [42], Portes [33], Coleman [43], Cramb [44], Mayoux [45] and Babaei [8]. Moreover, some studies show that bonding, bridging and linking social capital increased empowerment but that bonding social capital had a strongly positive relationship towards bridging and linking social capital among poor people [20, 29, 38, 41, 42, 44, 46, 47].

Much of Lin's [47] work in the area of social capital has examined social ties. The strength of the tie is a determining factor in the successful attainment of social capital. There remains a distinction between strong ties and weak ties. Although it might seem logical that a strong tie would provide for access to resources, in reality, the opposite is the case. Strength is defined by "a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie" [24]. Strong ties allow for the creation of bonding social capital within one's own group. These relationships tend to form based on the homogeneous nature of the group. To avail oneself of additional resources, a connection must be formed with other groups to create bridging social capital. This bridge stems from a weaker tie, but very often will provide the social capital to expand one's horizons. The same may be said about the relationship between individuals and systems, which creates linking social capital. The common reaction would be that because having a tie with a larger system would provide for greater benefits it would be considered stronger. However, this is not the case. Although the relationships between individuals and systems are not as strong as the relationships between individuals and family members, it is the weaker ties that provide more opportunities. According to Alagheband [48], some sociologists and scholars believe that Iran needs to have bridging and linking social capital more than bonding social capital, because of the need to have strengthened relations between individuals and the organizations and government. In addition, these findings concur with past research, such as Alagheband [48], who argued that in Iran poor people have very limited social relationships, low level social status and social class which is resulted in less bridging and linking social capital. Finally, it can be concluded that among the three dimensions of social capital, bonding, bridging and linking social capital can predict the empowerment among squatter settlements in Tehran. The foregoing conceptual discussion has led to two conclusions about the links between empowerment and social capital, which are directly operationally relevant: First, building social capital is one way to

facilitate empowerment and, second, viewing empowerment and social capital as multilevel concepts facilitates the link with poverty reduction strategies [10, 40].

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