The Impact of Social Support on the Quality of Life of Self-Supporting Women (A Sociological Study)

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**ABSTRACT**

Today, the world is encountering an increase in the number of self-supporting or household-supporting women. The purpose of the study is to analyze between empowerment of self-supporting women teachers and quality of their life. This survey has been done in Fars Province, a city in south of Iran. The major criterion for selection of my samples was cluster sampling, then the researcher used simple random sampling as a final method for choosing the samples. In this study, the researcher has chosen 287 teachers out of 1146 teachers of self-supporting women teachers in Fars Province according to Cochran Formula. The major tool for this study was Questionnaire. Using Chi-Square Test was shown that there is a relationship between social support and quality of life of self-supporting women. The ANOVA test of the relationship between the level of education and quality of life is 2.691 at a significant level (p<0.05) indicates that the quality of life of the respondents depends on the level of their education. Thus, it is inferred that higher level of education brings a higher level of quality of life. Based on the result of conducted research when the social support increase the level of quality of life will also increase.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Today, the world is encountering with an increase in the number of self-supporting or household-supporting women. According to the most recent Iranian statistical data (ref: Iranian statistic center: 15), the number of self-supporting women in Iran is estimated to be about 1,307,312. Divorced women, widows, and women who have addicted husbands or prisoner husbands are among self-supporting women. The self-supporting women and their families should not be abandoned at all, since they are susceptible to many forms of damage. The welfare organizations, charity institutions or the Relief Committees must identify all those families and help them. The help given should not be solely economic, but they should be paid attention socially and culturally as well. In any country suffering from different economic crisis, social damages due to this crisis are undeniable and non-negligible and one can say, emphatically, that self-supporting or household-supporting women are more susceptible to such damages than men and it is the duty of governments to teach life skills and abilities to household-supporting women, provide conditions that they can act better in stressful and crisis-bearing situations and find appropriate solutions for reducing their problems.

Indeed, we can relate that the Development Organization has an important role in the promotion of quality of life. Every country should be having National improvement Quality of Life Centre (NIQC) for the purposes such as evaluating education in schools and universities, survey of women and children who have many problems and risk factors in their life, and determination of income and quality of life is the degree of well-being felt by an individual or group of people.

Quality of life is a concept more extensive than a merely medical subject and can be used in fields such as psychology, sociology, economics and environmental and regional studies as well [5].

Quality of life would be promising and potential for improving people and globalization has been beneficial only selectively. Globalization is the close integration of the countries and people of the world, because of major reduction in transportation costs, improvements information flows and a reduction in trade barriers [4].

Self-supporting women will be empowered; if they can improve skills for well-being in their live. So, this part analyses the concept of women’s empowerment and outlines various empowerment strategies.
Since the mid-1980s, the term empowerment has become popular in the development field, especially with reference to women. However, there is confusion as to what the term means among development actors. The concept of women’s empowerment is the outcome of important critiques generated by the women’s movement, particularly by ‘third world’ feminists. They clearly state that women’s empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources. Women participate in their own oppression so they must first become aware of the ideology that legitimizes male domination.

The empowerment process starts from within but access to new ideas and information will come from external agents. With new consciousness and the strength of solidarity, women can assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decision making. Ultimately, women’s empowerment must become a force that is an organized mass movement which challenges and transforms existing power relations in society [1].

Unless women are ‘empowered’ to participate alongside men in the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. Empowerment strategies must carefully define their meaning of ‘empowerment’ and be integrated into mainstream programs rather than attempted separately [3].

Materials and methods of the study:

The researcher has used cluster sampling. After selecting all clusters as a region, the researcher utilized simple random sampling for choosing her sample. It was considered the most appropriate to choose these districts for the present study.

The self-supporting women school-teachers in the Shiraz Department of Education were 1100 in 2010 according to the most recent date given in IRAN Education Leaflet which has increased to 1146 in 2012. In this study, the researcher has chosen 287 teachers out of 1146 self-supporting women teachers in Fars province; the selected sample covers 20 percent of the total population of self-supporting women teachers in Fars according Cochran Formula.

Tools & methods for the data collection:

As the study is qualitative and quantitative, questionnaire, and interview have been used as major tools for the collection of primary data.

Questionnaire:

The major tool for collecting data in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire has been designed consisting both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions; for answering the multiple-choice questions, the respondents have selected one of the alternative possible answers put to her, whereas in the latter, the respondents had to supply the answers in their own words. There were so many questions with “yes and no” answers. The respondents have select one out of two choices.

The questionnaire prepared for the purpose of this study was then shown to be confirmed by the experts in this field, thereafter, the test for validity and reliability was conducted by using a popular statistical technique namely Cronbach’s Alpha (Cronbach’s Alpha=80). The results manifested good reliability of the questionnaire. For the last stage, the researcher has given the finalized questionnaire to all respondents for the collection of primary data.

Classification and tabulation of collection of data:

The large amount of scattered materials collected from diverse sources has been classified into various categories on the basis of their similarity and formality. Keeping in mind the nature and objectives of the study, classification of data was done on a periodical, quantitative and qualitative basis. Under qualitative classification, both differential and multi-quality types were inserted. The main objective of this classification is to make analysis and interpretation of data more reliably in order to reach accurate findings.

A scheme of coding was devised for transforming the data from the questionnaire schedule to the computer and working with special spreadsheet software like SPSS, MS- excel packages. Thus, the tables and charts were derived through ‘computer tabular procedure’.

During the coding process some considerations must be taken not to overlook important data. After arranging the collected data through tabulation and classification, they are analyzed and interpreted in the socio-economic context so as to give a scientific form and basis to the study. Several statistical methods like measures of central tendencies, percentages, standard deviation, correlation, regression and parametric test like t-test, and ANOVA and non-parametric tests like chi-square, and Friedman tests were used in the study where they are applied in a relevant way. The researcher has put her best and utmost efforts to make proper analysis and interpretation of data for achieving a reliable conclusion in an objective manner.

Development empowers people and promotes important changes in their lives. However, development cannot take place by itself. It requires educated, skilled and competent people. Seen from this angle, education
becomes the most important factor for development as well as for empowering people. Education provides people with knowledge and information which in turn bring about desirable changes in the way they think, feel and act. Education also builds a strong sense of self-esteem, self-confidence in individuals and contributes very effectively to the realization of their potentials.

Apart from economic development, the social and cultural development is possible through education. To be empowered, women must have equal capabilities such as education and health, and equal access to resources and opportunities such as land and employment. However they must also have the agency to use these capabilities and resources to make strategic choices.

Self-supporting women will be empowered; if they can improve skills for well-being in their live. So, this part analyses the concept of women’s empowerment and outlines various empowerment strategies.

Unless women are ‘empowered’ to participate alongside men in the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. Empowerment strategies must carefully define their meaning of ‘empowerment’ and be integrated into mainstream programs rather than attempted separately [3].

Results of the research hypothesize:

It is evident from the table number 1, that 28 respondents who are at the lowest level of quality of life received low social support; 113 respondents with moderate quality of life, received Low social support. No body of respondents that takes a high level of social support has a low quality of life. 9 respondents that have substantial quality of life received low level social support. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents with substantial quality of life has high levels of social support, and only 3 respondents with good quality of life, enjoy high levels of social support. It can be inferred that most of the respondents have moderate quality of life and also receive a moderate level of social support, because they are working in the same organization and they are benefited by logical rule and support.

Table 1: Quality of Life * Social Support Cross Tabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of life</th>
<th>Low Level</th>
<th>Moderate Level</th>
<th>High Level</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Quality of Life</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Quality of Life</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Quality of life</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial Quality of Life</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests social support and quality of life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>13.607</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>14.200</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>5.648</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Valid Cases</td>
<td>286</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the chi-square value as 13.60 with 6 degree freedom at 0.034 level of significance which is lower than normal probability value i.e. 0.05. The calculated value of chi-square is higher than the normal probability value and it leads to rejection of the null hypothesis and supporting the hypothesis. As a conclusion, there is a relationship between social support and quality of life of self-supporting women.

Table 3: Anova Test for Education and Quality of Life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups (Combined)</td>
<td>4.821</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.607</td>
<td>2.691</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear Term Unweighted</td>
<td>4.439</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.439</td>
<td>7.433</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted</td>
<td>2.523</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.523</td>
<td>4.224</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviation</td>
<td>2.298</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.149</td>
<td>1.924</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>169.005</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>173.826</td>
<td>286</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data indicates the perception of respondents of education and quality of life and indicates that the F value is 2.691 as the significance value of 0.04 which is lower than normal probability value that is 0.05. Hence once can accept the relationship between the level of education and quality of life. This may be due to higher income and having more information and other social relations at different levels of education regarding the quality of life issues.
It is clear from the above table that quality of life is being increased by the enhancement of social support. The calculated mean deviation reveals that the amount of dispersion is high as the value dispersion is high. Thus, it can be said that the mean of quality of life of respondents who belong to low social support equals 159.65; the mean of the quality of life of respondents who enjoy moderate social support, equals 169.02; and the mean of the quality of life of respondents who live in high levels of social supports is 167.90.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Socially Supported</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Level of Social Support</td>
<td>159.65</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>14.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Level of Social Support</td>
<td>169.02</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>18.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Level of Social Support</td>
<td>167.90</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160.90</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>17.465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one-sample ‘T –Test’ between governmental support and parents support and the above two distributions denote that the means are 1.48 and 1.29 with standard deviations of 0.949 and 1.292, and standard error mean of 0.56 and 0.76 at a quite significant level; and ‘t’ values are 26.431 and 18.089 with the 286 degrees of freedom. Hence, it can be inferred that governmental support is more important than parents support (1.481>1.38). During the field study, the self-supported teachers stated that the interventions from government side are more important than from the parents, as only government can resolve many social problems which they have been facing for decades.

Discussion and conclusion:

The structural aspects of the quality of life, include material welfare (capital or income), quality of the family life, transportation, bodily welfare (health, adequacy, mobility), personal security, social welfare (social relations, social participation), emotional welfare (having a positive influence, having a place and position, being revered), mental health or stress, realization of individual abilities, religion and belief, participation or constructiveness, and being efficient (including control, selection and independence) [6].

There was a strong correlation between social supports, social activities and social contacts. The increase in the quality of life in the elderly and in the regions with higher social assets and a better quality on the whole, led into a higher quality of life. Therefore, the social asset score had the highest effect on the self-assessment of quality of life.

One of the important finding of this study which was quite remarkable was that, those self-supporting women teachers who were receiving more financial and psychological supports from their family members, had better quality of life and more life satisfaction, but in general, most of the respondents tended to live independently and to be responsible for the management and administration of their life without the interference of others.

Majority of the respondents who expressed that, divorce was the reason for them to become the protector of their families were more satisfied with their current conditions and as they expressed, they had a difficult and sad life before they were divorced.

The statistical analyses showed that, if the level of education increases, the quality of life will also increase.

Respondents who had an average social support, had an average quality of life, so there is a positive correlation between social support and quality of life.

There is also a positive relationship between social support and quality of life of self-supporting women. So, when the level of social support increases, quality of life also will increase.

In comparing various supports from government or family, the observations show that, the governmental supports have more positive impact on respondents’ problems, in a manner that, when the governmental supports increase, the quality of life of these people will also increase. (In emergency situations, the government helps to destitute self-supporting women can effectively decrease their problems and hence increase the quality of their life).

REFERENCES