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# Obstacles of Women Presence in Iranian Rural Management: A Case from Osku County

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## Abstract

The presence of women in social and managerial fields is one of the indicator of social justice and development that leads to optimum use of capabilities and potentials of half of the country's rural population. In the recent years, establishing public institution of Dehyary by the Ministry of Interior have provided new opportunity for women presence in rural management. This study aimed to identify women's participation obstacles in rural management in Iran, specifically in Dehyary. The statistical population of this study was 15-64 year – old females which were resident in rural areas of Oskou County. Applying a proportional random sampling and Cochran formula, 347 women were chosen to be surveyed as sample. A questionnaire was used for data collection, which its face validity was approved by a panel of experts and its reliability was calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha=0.84$ ). The results revealed that, negative attitudes and believes in rural community is the most important obstacle for women to participate in rural management. Furthermore, factor analysis categorized obstacles for women participation in six factors including cultural, personal, supportive, job-related, religious and Economic constrains.

**Keywords:**

*Rural management,  
Dehyary, Rural women,  
Participation, Iran*

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## INTRODUCTION

Development in any country is directly related to women's participation in political, social, economic and cultural fields. During the 1970s with attention to values such as, social development and equity and freedom, women's role in development became more obvious and evident and it was proved that meeting these goals is almost impossible without women's participation. Thus women participation in national development process was gradually taken into account by national and international development organizations, so that many countries and international organizations, seriously considered the relationship between development plans and improvement of women's general condition (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007).

Furthermore, changes occurred in the economic growth in Asia has led to an increasing demand for female managers and specialists. Higher education expansion and decreasing fertility rate have facilitated women's participation in labor market so that currently more women have been educated and reached the qualified managerial positions (Yuknogdi and Rowley, 2009).

Almost all of these policies aimed to aware people about the importance of women socio – economic status and their role in national and regional development (Soroushmehr et al., 2010).

Therefore recent changes in addition to more attention to human resources development have led to improvement of traditional viewpoints about women and participation of women in political, administrative and educational positions and employment market is a sign of these evolutions.

Although rural women constitute half of the human resources in rural community and are engaged in a variety of roles in cultural, social and economic dimensions especially in family welfare and children raising and instruction, rarely enter in official and administrative jobs which are rooted in low level of education, ethnic and cultural issues (Leonard, 2001). Moreover, their low presence in agricultural leadership in a range of international contexts is well recorded (Pini, 2002).

Furthermore cultural and social factors create more obstacles for women especially in rural communities and third world countries (World Bank, 1998).

In fact, for attaining sustainable rural development, the participation and involvement of rural women in decision making at the local level, es-

tablishment of rural institutions and associations and social and political activities must be simultaneously considered by planners (European Commission, 2000). Different studies have examined woman's participation in social, political and cultural fields, out of which some has been reviewed as follows, although a few have addressed women's participation in rural management in Iran. ReisiMobarakeh (1988), in his study concluded that, traditional patterns, structural and attitude barriers, the negative role of mass media in presenting prototypes about women and men and limited access of women to management education and training are among obstacles that restrict women's participation. Vosoughi and Yousefi Agha Bin (2005) revealed that subcultures such as fatalism, lack of women participation in executive, administrative and policy making activities, lack of believe in science and adoption of technology, low level of education, lack of self-confidence of rural women, and men preventing them from participation in decision making are among obstacles for women participation in different fields of rural affairs.

Shaditalab and Kamali (2002) investigated the obstacle for women participation in different economic, social, cultural, political and legal dimensions. Gender socialization, domination of asceticism and man-oriented culture, weakness of education and low level of general education, lack of self-confidence and need of achievement among rural women, are obstacles, mentioned in this study. They stated that structural and family limitations as most important rural women's social participation obstacles.

Ravdrad (2000) in an analysis of women's role in development with focus on employment summarized the barriers of developing women's role in development in two categories: occupational / job related and cultural obstacles. Esfidani (2002) in his study entitled, women barriers for achieving managerial positions and concluded that lack of women's presence in managerial positions is because of environmental and cultural conditions affecting a woman's presence in managerial positions. Jajarmi and Karimi (2010) in their study about social challenges of rural councils, asserted that lack of ownership, and capital, illiteracy or low literacy level and paternalism culture in villages, are main obstacles of women's participation in rural management. Anbari and Hasanvand (2010) stated that traditional viewpoint toward women and domination of paternalistic view in different levels

from household to organizations and administrations are obstacles of women's participation in rural management. [Maleki and Shokati Amghan \(2011\)](#) in review of opportunities and threats of women's participation in rural management concluded that there are threats and challenges for female agents (female Dehyars) that lead to reluctance of themselves or their families for participation in these positions. They stated the main problems as transportation, difficulties of communicating with rural principals, lack of support from village council's members and other principals because of traditional viewpoints about women. Furthermore, they believed that for other family's members is hard to handle family affairs in the absence of women. [Khabbazzadeh \(2011\)](#) Categorized women's obstacles in rural development. These were individual factors (low level at education, workloads at home and farm, low level of awareness about their rights, malnutrition and low level of health and hygiene), family factors (paternalism, family prejudices (traditions), negative attitudes toward women abilities, gender discrimination and family poverty) and social factors (inappropriate traditions and customs, lack or low level of access to credit, facilities and production inputs, lack of access to extension services, low number of female specialists for instruction of rural women, low level of women's presence in rural management and their low level of salary). [\(Pini, 2002\)](#), based on a list of constraints of women's participation in agricultural leadership, investigated, constrains faced by women for participation in agricultural leadership. This study categorized constrains into five categories including: lack of support, time and location of meetings, the masculinity culture of organization, women's multiple commitments and lack of interest.

To sum up, women's participation in rural management leads to design and implementation of various appropriate educational programs in different social, cultural, political and economic fields for empowering rural women and girls. It is while presence and participation of women in social, cultural and political activities generally and rural management specifically has been ignored.

Out of 25,000 Dehyary <sup>1</sup> in Iran, women are only involved in 888 numbers of them ([Maleki and Shokati Amghan, 2011](#)).

Thus, attention to women's participation in

rural management in developing countries like Iran is necessary. In this regard, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the barriers of women's participation in rural management in Oskou County. Accordingly the following specific objectives were examined:

- 1- The respondent' demographic characteristics;
- 2- Prioritizing women's participation obstacles in rural management;
- 3- Perception of rural women about women's participation in rural management.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive-survey research was conducted in Oskou County in East of Azerbaijan province, Iran. This county was selected purposively for being the county with no woman in charge of rural management (Dehyary). 13430 women and girls are living in the rural areas of Oskou County who were between 15 and 64 years old ([Rousta News, 2012](#)). The sample size was determined based on the Cochran's formula, which consisted of 347 women selected through a proportional stratified random sampling approach with 40 villages as the categories. Data for this survey study were collected using a structured questionnaire, which addressed rural women. The questionnaire included two parts. The first covered demographic characteristics of rural women and the second one covered questions related to barriers that rural women were confronting with for participating in rural management. Validity of the questionnaire was assessed by a panel of experts and reliability of the main scales of the questionnaire was measured by computing Cronbach's ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). Women's barriers for participating in rural management (being in charge of Dehyary) were measured using a five point Likert-type scale with 35 items, which was extracted out of literature review. The survey instrument contained a series of questions to which the respondents could indicate their level of agreement/disagreement on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). In this research, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze collected data. Descriptive statistics included percent, mean, standard deviation and inferential statistics included factor analysis. All data were analyzed using the SPSS for Windows. Dehyaris first appeared in the legislation in Iran as a non-governmental public institution ([Estelaji, 2010](#)).

<sup>1</sup> Village management bodies in Iran.

Table 1: Prioritization of women participation obstacles in rural management

| Item   | Mean | SD   | CV     |
|--|------|------|--------|
| Fear of lack of cooperation of villagers with female Dehyar.   | 3.63 | 1.22 | 0.3361 |
| Traditional customs, traditions and culture about rural women working.                                     | 3.62 | 1.24 | 0.3425 |
| Lack of government and rural community to rural women rights.  | 3.62 | 1.26 | 0.3481 |
| Traditional believes and attitude toward women ability.  | 3.60 | 1.13 | 0.3139 |
| Lack of government attention to women needs and obstacles.   | 3.59 | 1.20 | 0.3343 |
| Lack of permission by parents or husband to take part in Dehyary's activity                                | 3.50 | 1.30 | 0.3714 |
| Low level of self-confidence of rural women and girls.   | 3.48 | 1.21 | 0.3477 |
| Dominance of paternalistic culture in rural community.   | 3.48 | 1.22 | 0.3506 |
| Illiteracy or low level of education of rural women.   | 3.48 | 1.33 | 0.3822 |
| Fear of being mocked by villagers.   | 3.47 | 1.33 | 0.3833 |
| Lack of interest to rural culture and life.  | 3.47 | 1.35 | 0.3890 |
| Fear of lack of cooperation of male coworkers in Rural Council or governmental agencies with female Dehyar | 3.44 | 1.23 | 0.3576 |
| Illiteracy or under – literacy (low level of education) of parents or husband.                             | 3.41 | 1.23 | 0.3607 |
| Lack of general facilities and welfare for rural women.  | 3.39 | 1.40 | 0.4130 |
| Lack of independent decision making of rural women about different affairs of family.                      | 3.33 | 1.17 | 0.3514 |
| Lack of motivation in rural women for becoming Dehyar  | 3.33 | 1.33 | 0.3994 |
| Lack of job security for Dehyars.  | 3.32 | 1.22 | 0.3675 |
| Perceived hard condition of rural life   | 3.32 | 1.30 | 0.3916 |
| Discrimination against rural women.  | 3.30 | 1.24 | 0.3758 |
| Work overload in house and farm  | 3.25 | 1.30 | 0.4000 |
| Involving in housekeeping activities.  | 3.17 | 1.45 | 0.4574 |
| Perceived hardness of responsibility of Dehyaris.  | 3.16 | 1.22 | 0.3861 |
| Unemployment of household head.  | 3.14 | 1.36 | 0.4331 |
| Low level of household heads' income   | 3.13 | 1.30 | 0.4153 |
| lack of managerial competencies in rural women   | 3.10 | 1.27 | 0.4097 |
| Low salary of Dehyars  | 3.08 | 1.23 | 0.3994 |
| Work load of Dehyar position   | 3.03 | 1.25 | 0.4125 |
| Problems of transport to organizations related to rural management.  | 3.03 | 1.34 | 0.4422 |
| Fear of correctly managing of Dehyary budget.  | 2.99 | 1.28 | 0.4281 |
| Far distance between village and cities or among villages  | 2.87 | 1.35 | 0.4704 |
| Incapability of rural women for accepting Dehyary position.  | 2.84 | 1.27 | 0.4472 |
| Seasonal immigration of men because of seasonal unemployment.  | 2.65 | 1.38 | 0.5208 |
| Malnutrition and low level of health of rural women and girls.   | 2.55 | 1.22 | 0.4784 |
| Lack at acceptance of female Dehyar among village people.  | 2.31 | 1.23 | 0.5325 |
| Involving in activities related to farming.  | 2.07 | 1.32 | 0.6377 |
| Involving in activities related to rural industries.   | 1.94 | 1.32 | 0.6804 |
| Involving in activities related to animal husbandry  | 1.75 | 1.19 | 0.6800 |

This institution is the executive part of rural management which works under the supervision of village council. According to council's law variety of tasks are delivered to Dehyary ([Akabari, 2003](#)). The responsibility of choosing Dehyar (the person who is assigned to work in Dehyary) is one of the village council tasks.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings showed that most of the surveyed women were young ( $M= 25$ ) and most of them were in 15-25 years of age category. About 6.3 percent of the respondents were illiterate, 22.2 percent of them had received elementary education, 28 percent had finished guidance school, 35.7 percent had high school diploma and the rest had a higher education certificate. About 48.1 percent of studied women were housekeeper,

40.3 percent were student, 4 percent carpet weaver, 3.2 percent employees and the rest were self-employed. About 52.7 percent were married and the others were single.

## Prioritization of women participation obstacles in rural management

Mean was used to prioritize women obstacles for participating in rural management (Table 1). According to the finding depicted in table 1, "Fear of lack of cooperation of villagers with female Dehyar", "Traditional customs, traditions and culture about rural women working" were the most important obstacles and "involving in activities related to animal husbandry" and "involving in activities related to rural industries" were the least important obstacles from the rural women point of view.

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Table 2: The extracted factors along with the Eigen values, variance percentage and the cumulative variance percentage

| cumulative variance percentage | Variance percentage | Eigen value | Factor No. |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------|
| 11.08                          | 11.08               | 2.43        | 1          |
| 21.63                          | 10.55               | 2.32        | 2          |
| 32.12                          | 10.48               | 2.30        | 3          |
| 42.44                          | 10.32               | 2.27        | 4          |
| 51.48                          | 9.03                | 1.98        | 5          |
| 59.53                          | 8.04                | 1.77        | 6          |

Table 3: The factors determining the constraints women facing for participating in rural management

| Factors                 | Constraints   | Factor Loads |
|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| Cultural constraints    | Traditional beliefs and attitude toward women ability   | .672         |
|                         | Discrimination against rural women  | .636         |
|                         | Lack of permission by parents or husband to take part in Dehyary's activity                               | .635         |
|                         | Dominance of paternalistic culture in rural community.  | .549         |
| Personal constraints    | Traditional customs, traditions and culture about rural women working                                     | .535         |
|                         | Lack of motivation in rural women for becoming Dehyary  | .777         |
|                         | lack of managerial competencies in rural women  | .744         |
|                         | Low level of self-confidence of rural women and girls.  | .702         |
| Supportive constraints  | Incapability of rural women for accepting Dehyary position.   | .650         |
|                         | Lack of government and rural community to rural women rights.   | .795         |
|                         | Lack of government attention to women needs and obstacles.  | .685         |
|                         | Involving in activities related to farming  | .878         |
| Job-related constraints | Involving in activities related to animal husbandry   | .825         |
|                         | Involving in activities related to rural industries.  | .769         |
|                         | Work overload in house and farm   | .726         |
|                         |   |              |
| religious constraints   | Fear of correctly managing of Dehyary budget.   | .742         |
|                         | Fear of lack of cooperation of male coworkers in Rural Council or government agencies with female Dehyary | .709         |
| Economic constraints    | Fear of lack of cooperation of villagers with female Dehyary.   | .605         |
|                         | Low level of household heads' income  | .819         |
|                         | Unemployment of household head  | .804         |

### Factor analysis of rural women opinion about obstacles of women participation

Using principal components approach, constraints to women's participation were reduced into six factors. In order to test the appropriateness of data for factor analysis KMO (0.739) and Bartlett's test (1315.166,  $p<0.01$ ) were applied. According to Kaiser Criteria there were six factors with Eigen values more than 1 (Table 2). Factors loadings greater than 0.50 were considered as significant. The research variables were categorized into six factors by using VarimaxRotation Method and explained 59.53 percent of variance (Table 3).

These factors were named: 1- cultural constraints, 2- personal constraints, 3- supportive constraints, 4- job-related constraints, 5- religious constraints and 6- Economic constraints.

### CONCLUSION

The sustainable rural development is highly dependent on women's participation in all affairs

and rural women have an effective role in fulfilling the objectives of sustainable rural development. It is while; the theoretical and empirical evidences reviewed in this study, showed that rural women have a little contribution in rural management including Dehyary which is a village management in Iran. This research found that the most important factor for less involvement of rural woman in village management is due to cultural barriers.

Since, paternalism is common in rural areas, hence women are reluctant to accept headship of Dehyaris. Thus effective participation of rural women in rural management requires cultural activities and programs and empowering rural women and eradicating problems and obstacles. Male managers cannot understand women's real needs and problems so they cannot plan and execute appropriate programs for improving rural women.

Given the research findings, following suggestions for increasing and improving women par-

ticipation in rural management are recommend::

- Educational programs for improving women managerial competencies can empower them for adopting managerial roles in rural community.
- Reconsidering and increasing Dehyar salary and insurance fee can increase women motivation for entering this position.
- Implementing cultural programs and improving villagers' attitude for accepting women Dehyars.
- Introducing progressive women in the field of rural management as model to increase rural women self- confidence with regard to their aptitudes.
- Upgrading women's literacy level and changing their attitude toward the importance of their participation in rural management.
- Improvement of rural management should be based on the culture and custom of the area.

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