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**AN INVESTIGATION OF EFFECTIVE FACTORS INVOLVED IN SOCIO-CULTURAL  
ROLES OF RURAL WOMEN FARMERS: A CASE STUDY IN THE WESTERN-  
AZARBAIJAN PROVINCE, IRAN**

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**Abstract**

*The main purpose of this study was to determine the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers and their influence of effective factors on their socio-cultural roles in Western-Azarbaijan Province, Iran. Rural women farmers have been selected using stratified randomization method (n=293). The result of this study showed that there are a significant difference among variables of education level of rural women farmers, their ethnic groups, education level of their household head, cultural and educational facilities of village and their socio-cultural roles. The results obtained from the factor analysis reveal that the four following factors, social, environmental, educational and cultural characteristics explain 61.76% of the variation of the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.*

**Introduction**

Rural women farmers are generally among the most disadvantaged groups of population, yet they play a key role in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, livestock and rural development, producing more than 50 percent of food (Hoffman, 2000; Kalbagh, 1991; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations-FAO, 1989).

Until recently, rural women have been neglected both in terms of our understanding of the particular kinds of problems that they face and directed toward their problems. In fact, over the past decade there has been an increasing concern to examine the role of women in rural development, to understand the particular contribution that women can and do make to this development, and to implement programs and projects designed to improve women's lives (Saikia borah, 1999).

Women have assumed a low status in society as a result traditional belief. Gender bias promotes unequal allocation of resources, whether of food, credit, education, job, information, or training. Gender bias is a major cause of poverty because in its various form sit prevents women from receiving the education, training, health services, childcare, and legal status to escape from poverty (Jacobson, 1993).

In the last decades of international development, women are recognized as a vital human resource. Any development program that proceeds without women's participation is self-defeating because of the potential loss of the contribution of this vital resource. In addition,

ignoring rural women's participation in development has consequences not only on the family level, but also on some sectors of the economy such as agriculture where women are more involved in farm work than men do. The consequences on some economic sectors are under utilizing women's capacities for employing their resources inefficiently. Development strategies should strive to reduce gender bias and its consequences to solve many of the economic and social problems. Women must be active participants in planning implementing, and evaluating development programs (Asian Development Bank, 2000). Women are generally accorded a lower status than men are not encouraged or expected to play an active role in extension activities. Rural women find it almost impossible to break out from their ascribed status in order to have some voice in development. In some societies, women are prohibited from conversing directly with non-family men. In others, custom forbids them to meet in public places, while in many; women are openly discouraged from participating in non-domestic activities (Momsen, 1995).

It is important for an extension agent to be aware of socio-cultural roles, which rural women have to assume, since they influence women's ability to participate in extension activities and to try to understand why there is often so little contact between his service and rural women. He should begin by analyzing the situation and understanding the socio-cultural roles which prevent women becoming more involved in extension activities, and should take them into consideration when planning these activities.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers and the influence of effective factors on their socio-cultural roles, in Western-Azarbaijan Province, Iran. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe rural women farmers by personal and social characteristics.
2. Identify the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.
3. Determine relationship between independent variables and farm women's socio-cultural roles.
4. Determine effective factors on socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.

### **Methods and Data Sources**

The methodological approach of this study employed a analytical method (correlational study). Rural women farmers in the Western-Azarbaijan Province were the target population that have been selected by using stratified randomization method (n=293).

From review of literature, a questionnaire was developed to collect data. Content and face validity of instrument were established by an expert panel, which consisted of faculty members in the Department of Agriculture and Extension Education of Islamic Azad University and extension officers in the Ministry of Jihad-e Agriculture ,Iran. A pilot study was conducted with 25 rural women farmers.

Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's Alpha. Reliability for the overall instrument was estimated at 0.86. A Cronbach's Alpha, reliability coefficient of 83.74% was calculated for the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers. Some independent variables of this study were: personal characteristics(age, education level, education level of household head, size of farm, number of livestock, ethnic groups, access to urban areas and contribution in educational courses)and social characteristics(self-reliance, household head attitude toward rural women's independence, use of mass media, studying rate and educational

and cultural facilities of village). The dependent variable of the study was socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers. The dependent variable was analyzed by Mann-Whitney test, Kruskal-Wallis test, Kendall's Tau test and Factor Analysis that used to investigate relationship between dependent and selected independent variables.

### Findings

*Objective One: Describe rural women farmers by personal and social characteristics.*

Rural women farmers who participated in the study ranged in age from 17 to 70 years. The mean age of respondents was 37.8 years. Rural women farmers were asked to report their highest level of education: 34.5% of rural women farmers were illiterate; 38.1% had an elementary education; 10.1% had secondary education; 12.6% had high school diploma. More than 68.7% of respondents were Azari Turkish and 30.6% were Kurdish. 21.2% of household head were illiterate. Almost 44% of the respondents reported visiting urban areas less than 5 times per month. 75.5% of rural women farmers did not have any resource. Almost 67% of the respondents stated that their farm was 1 to 5 ha. The mean farm size of the respondents was 4.73 ha. The mean number of livestock of respondents was 39 head. Less than 40.3 of respondents participated in educational courses. More than 61% of respondents reported studying less than one book or leaflet per month. The use of mass media ranged from 2 to 10 (M=5.84; S=2.60). The household head's attitude toward rural women's independence ranged from 4 to 20 (M=13.37; S=4.03). The self-reliance of rural women farmers ranged from 2 to 10 (M=5.56; S=3.27).

*Objective Two: Identify the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.*

Overall socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers with 21 items were ranged from 21-105 (M=74.60; S=24.39). The top five priorities the socio-cultural roles of them were participation in rural council selections, communication with other rural women, children study, performance of group activities and family planning.

**Table 1. Means and standard division for the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.**

	N	Mean	Std.Dev	Rank
Participation in rural council selections	290	4.44	0.61	1
Communication with other rural women	291	4.32	0.93	2
Children study	273	3.95	1.04	3
Performance of group activities	291	3.76	.94	4
Family planning	287	3.64	1.09	5

*Objective Three: Determine relationship between independent variables and farmwomen's socio-cultural roles.*

Results of table 2 shows that the relationship between the variables of self-reliance, household head's attitude toward rural women's independence, access to urban areas, use of mass media and studying rate of rural women farmers were significantly correlative and positively linked with their socio-cultural roles.

**Table 2. Determine relationship between independent variables and socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.**

Variables	n	r	p
Self-reliance	293	0.196**	0.000
Household head's attitude toward rural women's independence	291	0.211**	0.000
Access to urban areas	287	0.245**	0.000
Use of mass media	292	0.224**	0.000
Studying rate	287	0.190**	0.000

\*\*p&lt;0.01

For testing difference among respondent's groups, we employed Kruskal-Wallis test. Among the averages of the variables of education level of rural women farmers, ethnic groups, education level of their household head, cultural and educational facilities of village and socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers, significant differences are exposed (Table 3). Also, the result of this test showed that there is no significant difference among the age of rural women farmers and their socio-cultural roles at 5% level.

**Table 3. Differences among socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers and their characteristics.**

Variables	$\chi^2_{kw}$	d.f	p
Age	5.555	3	0.135
Education level	12.253**	3	0.007
Ethnic groups	39.315**	3	0.000
Education level of household head	23.937**	3	0.000
Cultural and educational facilities of village	14.218**	3	0.003

\*\*P&lt;0.01

For this part of study, we have used one type of nonparametric test, namely Mann-Whitney. The results of the study showed there is significant difference between two-target respondent's socio-cultural roles, who contributed in educational courses and those who did not.

**Table 4. Comparing mean socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers about contribution in educational courses.**

Variables	Mann-Whitney U	z	p
Contribution in educational courses	6812	-4.941**	0.000

\*\*P&lt;0.01

*Objective Four: Determine effective factors on socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers using factor analysis.*

By using Bartlett's test and KMO test determine whether research variables are appropriate for factor analysis(KMO=0.735;Bartlett=713.862,sig=0.000). The number of factors was determined using Eigenvalue and percent of variance (Kalantari, 2003). Table 5 shows the rotated factor loading for the final solution. An examination of the reduce subjectivity, items with factor loading equal to or greater than 0.4 were considered most important when factors were labeled.

**Table 5. Rotated factor loading for socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.**

Abbreviated items	Factor loading <sup>a</sup>
Factor one = social characteristics	
Self-reliance	0.597
Access to urban areas	0.679
Household head's attitude toward rural women's independence	0.763
Factor two = Environmental characteristics	
Cultural and educational facilities of village	0.813
Ethnic groups	-0.635
Factor three = cultural characteristics	
Use of mass media	0.675
Contribution in educational courses	-0.666
Factor four = educational characteristics	
Studying rate	0.658
Education level	0.804
Education level of household head	0.848

<sup>a</sup> factor loading < 0.4 were omitted

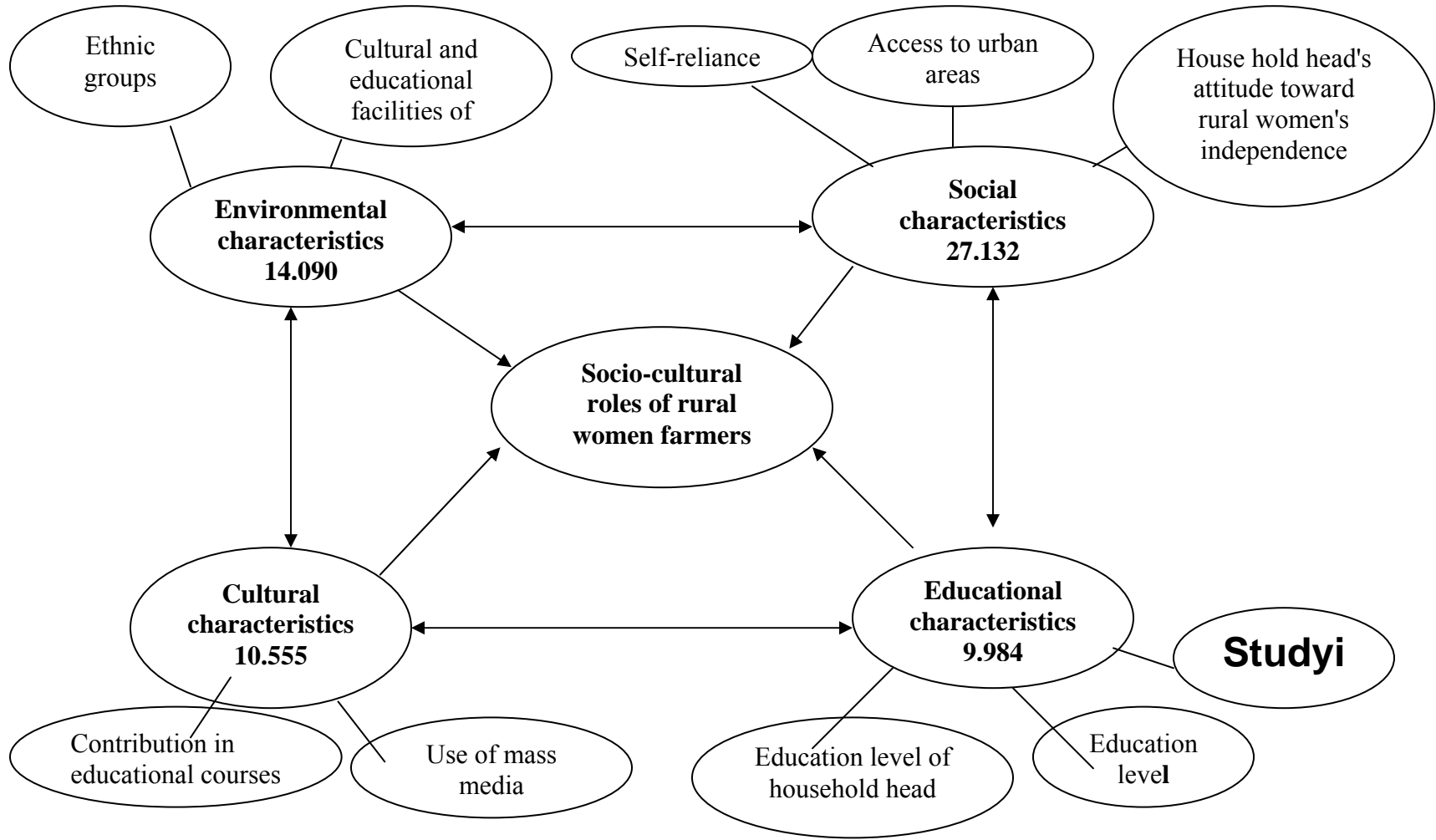
The four factors were labeled (1) social characteristics (2) Environmental characteristics, (3) cultural characteristics and (4) educational characteristics. The results obtained from the factors analysis reveal that the four following factors, social, environmental, cultural and educational characteristics explain 61.762% of the variation of the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers. (Table 6; Figure1)

**Table 6. Percent of variance explained by factors underlying socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.**

Factors	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Social characteristics	27.132	27.132
Environmental characteristics	14.090	41.222
Cultural characteristics	10.555	51.778
Educational characteristics	9.984	61.762

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusion were drawn and recommendation given. The results of the differences among socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers and their characteristics showed that education level of rural women farmers, their ethnic groups, education level of their household head, cultural and educational facilities of village and their contribution in educational courses influence on their socio-cultural roles. Also, findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between self-reliance of rural women farmers, their household head's attitude toward rural women's independence, their access to urban areas, their use of mass media, their studying rate and their socio-cultural roles.



**Figure1. Explaining the variance of each of factors**

In addition, in factorial analysis it was determined that social, environmental, cultural and educational characteristics of subjects were the four factors which brought about 61.76% of changes in the socio-cultural roles of rural women farmers.

Therefore, it seems all of those factors and variables are cultural and social about rural women farmers and their rural society that should be taken in to consideration. It is recommended, for participating rural women farmers in extension projects or communicating with them, extension agents should understand social, environmental, educational and cultural characteristics of rural women farmers. If extension agents would like succeed in their extensional and educational about rural women farmers, they have to consider and promote awareness and cultural criteria of rural society.

Besides, the real socio-cultural obstacles that rural women face must be understood, and extension agents, where possible, should seek out ways of channeling extension resources into activities which directly women.

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