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**PATHWAYS TO WOMENS' EMPOWERMENT IN NORTHERN IRAN**

A Dissertation in  
Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management

by

Yeganeh Aghazamani

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The dissertation of Yeganeh Aghazamani was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Deborah L. Kerstetter  
Professor Emeritus of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Peter Allison  
Associate Professor of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management

Peter Newman  
Professor of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management  
Head of Department

Linda A. Wray  
Associate Professor of Biobehavioral Health

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

## ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment, which is the focus of the United Nation's fifth Sustainable Development Goal, has been a concern of the global community for several years. While empowerment is defined and measured in various ways, scholars believe that a context-based definition is required to measure empowerment in developing countries due to their different cultural, political, and economic circumstances (Tosun, 2002; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). This is particularly true when it comes to measuring women's empowerment resulting from development such as tourism. The role of tourism development on perceptions of women's roles and responsibilities has been influential to the extent that communities no longer expect women to focus only on reproduction, they, too, can work outside the home, take on leadership responsibilities, and more (Khani, 2012).

To explore the intersection between women's empowerment and tourism development, this study focused on the experiences of local women in one tourism destination—Ramsar province in Northern Iran. The research question I answered was: What are women's perspectives on empowerment? In answering this question I uncovered women's perspectives on empowerment and the degree to which tourism development may have affected their perspective.

Using a qualitative approach, I uncovered 10 themes pertaining to women's perspective on empowerment. The themes included having a formal job or an informal activity (e.g., raising vegetables for family use), and being good-tempered, risk taking, brave, and responsible. They also included being a game changer who influences others

and efficiently doing their job and achieving their goals; challenging norms (e.g., selecting their preferred hejab); being trusted and involved in philanthropic activities; being financially (e.g., having income) and intellectually (e.g., making decisions and expressing ideas) independent; taking care of their family (e.g., support husband, children, and family members) and managing their house (e.g., cleaning, cooking, managing household finance) at the same time; being sociable and able to interact with people from different cultures; being educated and/or informed about societal issues; making progress through nurturing successful children and contributing financially and non-financially to the survival of their family; and having faith in God and being hopeful that God will help them when they are in need.

One-half of the women believed they were empowered. The other women, who identified as “somewhat empowered” or “not empowered,” believed their limited or non-existent empowerment was due to their inability to reach their goals, find a job, balance their work life and home life, and/or because of their limited work experience. Hence, the results indicated that empowerment is not a zero-sum concept. There is a spectrum for empowerment that includes empowered, somewhat empowered, and not empowered, all of which present differently in terms of what constitutes empowerment. In addition, the study provided evidence of “leveled empowerment,” suggesting that a woman can feel empowered and not empowered at the same time. These perceptions have their roots in a woman’s own expectations and priorities. These findings are in contrast with templates offered in the literature, which propose two categories of empowerment—empowered

and disempowered (e.g., Boley, Ayscue, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2017; Panta & Thapa, 2017; Scheyvens, 1999).

Through applying an inductive approach, which is unlike most deductive studies conducted with women in Iran, this study contributed to the literature by uncovering 10 themes associated with empowerment, 2 of which (i.e., behavioral characteristics and faith) are new to the literature. While the new themes may be context dependent, they do challenge existing notions of empowerment and reinforce the need to continue to study empowerment using an inductive approach.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In 2015 the United Nations adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity” (United Nations, 2015a, para. 1). The fifth SDG focused specifically on gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls, which, according to the United Nations, is a “fundamental human right... [and] a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world” (United Nations, 2015b, para. 2). According to some scholars, this goal can be achieved through economic independence, yet evidence indicates that socially powerful and economically independent women can still be subordinated both within their household and within society (Annes & Wright, 2015; Tickemayer & Kusujiarti, 2012). This is particularly true in patriarchal societies like Iran, where, if married, women cannot legally exit the country without the formal permission of their husbands. In addition, women receive one-half of the compensation (e.g., insurance payment) men receive for death or injury, only 16.4% are employed, and very few (i.e., 3%) occupy parliamentary seats (World Bank, 2015). Given the increasing evidence that empowerment may be multi-dimensional and have different meanings and outcomes for women, particularly those who live in patriarchal societies, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the notion of empowerment for women in Iran.

Empowerment has been defined and measured in various ways, but applying existing definitions to developing countries that possess different cultural, political, and

economic circumstances has proven problematic (Tosun, 2002; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). For example, empowerment in one context (e.g., being employed outside the home) represents disempowerment in another context (e.g., being beaten up for being employed outside the home) (Cornwall, 2003; Timothy, 2001). In this example cultural mores affect how empowerment has been defined (Afshar, 2016; Sen & Mukherjee, 2014). Experiencing new opportunities through tourism development may also affect the way in which empowerment is defined and perceived. For instance, in rural Iran community-based tourism development has positively impacted women by giving them the opportunity to leave the isolation of their home to participate in community meetings, raise their knowledge about what happens around them and, in some cases, experience economic independency (Vosughi & Ghasemi, 2014). Tourism development has also generated changes in women's roles and responsibilities, which has positively impacted others' perceptions of women's traditional roles so much so that they do not expect women to focus solely on household chores (Khani, 2012). As a result, there is a need to explore the definition of empowerment locally in a community impacted by tourism development (Kabeer, 1999; Syed, 2010; Sharma, 2008).

Following is a short literature review to help set the stage for the purpose of this study. A more in-depth literature review follows in Chapter 2.

### **Literature Review**

Empowerment has been defined as a process or as an outcome that helps the oppressed to independently or collectively make progress in their life through making decisions and gaining control over their life (Hur, 2006; Page & Czuba, 1999; Timothy,

2007). Empowerment has been examined by researchers from a variety of disciplines such as psychology (Perkins & Zimmermann, 1995; Rappaport, 1987); management (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995); health sciences (Gibson, 1991); and political science (Banducci, Donovan, & Karp, 2004). Of particular interest to this study is how researchers from the fields of feminist/women's studies and travel and tourism address women and empowerment.

### **Women and Empowerment**

Researchers in women/feminist studies have viewed empowerment as a tool that enables women to gain control of their life through accessing resources, participating in decision-making, and changing prohibitive social norms (Kabeer, 1999). Rowlands (1997) defined empowerment as four forms of power highlighting agency (i.e., "power to"); collectivity (i.e., "power with"); self-awareness (i.e., "power within"); and domination (i.e., "power over"). "Power to" refers to an increase in individuals' ability to take action based on their willingness to reach their goals; "power with" includes an increase in individuals' ability to ask others to assist in addressing individual group needs or interests; "power within" reflects individuals' increased consciousness, self-domination, respect, and self-awareness; and "power over" represents individuals' increased ability to control others. In addition to considering different types of power, Rowlands suggested there are three dimensions of empowerment: personal (e.g., developing a sense self-confidence); relational (e.g., ability to negotiate); and collective (e.g., working together to achieve a goal).

Longwe (2002) proposed a comprehensive empowerment framework that considers women's access to resources ranging from basic needs, to credit, to education, to public services, and to decision-making in all aspects of policy making, planning, and administration. Her framework adopted a holistic view regarding the resources women require to progress in life. Similar to Rowlands (1997), Longwe views empowerment holistically; both authors emphasize an individual's basic needs, improvement of skills, and their relationships with others in ways that contribute to empowerment.

Researchers in developing countries such as Pakistan, India, and Turkey have used global definitions and treatments of "empowerment" to document outcomes of their efforts to empower women. They have found that empowerment is associated with increased awareness of and ability to stand up for rights; accessing education and employment opportunities; entrepreneurship; increasing self-confidence, self-respect, and mobility; improvement of communication skills; and involvement in decision-making (Bishop & Bowman, 2014; Chaudhary, Chani, & Pervaiz, 2012; Erman, Kalaycioglu, & Rittersberger, 2002; Ganle, Afriyi, & Segbefia, 2015; Jamal, Khadir, Raihana, & Sultana, 2016). Unfortunately, such changes may be not enough on their own to ensure empowerment.

Various researchers (Afshar, 2016; Gordon, 1996; Sen & Mukherjee, 2014; Zuhur, 2003) have revealed that there are situations where economically independent women do not question inequality or lack of power (Rowlands, 1997). Osmani (2016), for example, found that women in Bangladesh do not see unequal access to food as unfair because of the deep patriarchal culture that supports the belief that unequal access is "natural." This result, argued Osmani, supports the notion that empowerment is context-

specific and researchers must account for socio-cultural, political, and religious structures when studying women's empowerment (Alvi, 2005; Kabeer, 1999; Riger 1993; Sharma, 2008; Syed, 2010). To do this, researchers must investigate empowerment from the perspective of local women and must understand what is women's lived experience of empowerment.

Numerous researchers have substantiated the importance of defining empowerment from the perspective of local women. For instance, Erman et al. (2002) challenged the notion that autonomy leads to empowerment when they revealed that Turkish migrant women's participation in social and economic activities did not result in a lessening of their family's control. Those who were married still regarded their husband as the head of the family and themselves as inferior to their husbands. However, migrant women who felt important and talented because they contributed to the family's income perceived an elevation of their social and economic status.

Henry (2011) found that Egyptian women were experiencing conflict between their traditional gender roles, household chores, and signs of empowerment such as accessing education and employment opportunities. Their conflict originated from a dominant patriarchic culture in which family is the focal point and women are worried that their family may face stigma or scorn if they fail to adopt a traditional role. Although Henry's finding that subordination of women in a patriarchic society perpetuated inequality against women, other researchers (e.g., Afshar, 2016; Ali, 2014; Erman et al., 2002) found that respecting this prevailing, subordinating culture is a strategy women have used to improve their quality of life. For these women, empowerment is not about domination over others and/or challenging norms, but about applying strategies such as



Careful negotiation with men and educating their children about the negative effects of gender inequities in a way that remains respectful of local norms and at the same time allows them to pursue their goals.

### **Empowerment and Disempowerment in Tourism**

Scheyvens (1999) introduced an influential empowerment framework to the tourism field. Her framework for the evaluation of empowerment through tourism included four dimensions: economic, psychological, social, and political. Economic empowerment is defined as long-term financial benefits, equitable distribution of economic benefits including cash and non-cash benefits such as improvement in facilities, and the local community's access to resources (e.g., protected areas, water systems, and local household facilities). Researchers have associated signs of economic empowerment with direct economic benefits for local people, including employment (Coria & Calfucura, 2012); community control of financial benefits and productive assets (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014); keeping tourism earnings within the local community (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014); equitable distribution of economic benefits, including improvement in facilities (e.g., protected areas, water systems, and local household facilities) (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Scheyvens, 1999); and access to resources and jobs and having political influence in accessing job rights, increased indigenous ownership, and management (Coria & Calfucura, 2012).

Psychological empowerment is reflected in residents' self-esteem when tourists recognize and appreciate their culture. Residents' self-esteem has been exhibited through pride in their traditions and an increased willingness to share their experiences and

knowledge with tourists (Boley et al., 2015; Boley & McGehee, 2014; Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Jensen, 2010; Scheyvens, 1999). Tourist's recognition of the local culture has also contributed to an increased desire amongst residents to go to school and learn different skills (Jensen, 2010), which often positively impacts the welfare of low-status sectors of the residential community such as women and youth (Scheyvens, 1999).

Social empowerment is represented through the strengthened sense of cohesion and integrity that communities feel when involved in tourism. Individuals and families work together to build successful ventures such as building schools or improving roads. Social empowerment has also involved connectedness to the community, including a sense of community spirit (Boley et al., 2015) and increased community involvement (Boley et al., 2015; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014); enhanced local control over tourism (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999); social cohesion (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Scheyvens, 1999); and local community interactions with tourists (Jensen, 2010).

Lastly, political empowerment has occurred when diverse interest groups (e.g., women and youth) have access to and a voice in decision-making, know their voice makes a difference in how tourism is developed, and have an outlet to share their concerns about tourism development (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Boley et al., 2015; Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Farrelly, 2011; Scheyvens, 1999; Weng & Peng, 2014).

A number of tourism scholars have used Scheyvens' (1999) framework in their studies of empowerment. Cole (2007) and Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernandez-Ramirez (2010) found empowerment to be a process that entails local communities experiencing agency in collectively making decisions, acting upon their needs, and taking control over their life. Ramos and Prideaux (2014) added an environmental component focused on the

environmentally conscious tourism practices controlled by local residents, which they argued represents empowerment in tourism.

Other examples of empowerment research in tourism include Boley and McGehee's (2014) Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS), which they used to measure local people's psychological, social, and political empowerment. Scheyvens and Russell (2012) used a definition of empowerment developed by Zhao and Ritchie (2007), which linked empowerment to the participation of the poor in decision-making and their agency to remove barriers that exist against them (i.e., poverty reduction). Weaver (2010) focused on empowerment as indigenous control (i.e., residents are involved through controlling or presenting their culture as a tourism attraction) with residents of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

The opposite of empowerment—disempowerment—is a process by which locals are unable to gain control of their life due to miserable conditions caused by governments and elites (Han et al., 2014); monopolization of economic gains through central power; a sense of inferiority (Scheyvens, 1999; Weng & Peng, 2014); and competition, jealousy, even creation of conflict within the community (Scheyvens, 1999). Due to the negative impacts of tourism development on local people, tourism entails disempowering signs (Scheyvens, 1999).

Recognizing the miserable conditions caused by governments and elites that have contributed to disempowerment is very important for a number of reasons. First, women have always been exposed to gender bias, which has rendered them unable to use available and potential resources to improve their life conditions through tourism (Ferguson, 2011; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994). Second, acknowledging the disempowering

impacts of tourism can help policy makers and tourism planners to make informed decisions that will foster empowering opportunities for residents and, ultimately, increase their quality of life.

Economic disempowerment has been indicated through little to no income gain (Scheyvens, 1999); monopolization of economic benefits of tourism through local elites or co-operations; and reduced or no access to resources (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999; Weng & Peng, 2014). Psychological signs of disempowerment have included feelings of apathy, depression, disillusionment, confusion, indifference, frustration, and disappointment (Scheyvens, 1999), as well as a sense of powerlessness, conflict, loss of community interest in tourism development, fear of losing control of local planning and decision-making in tourism, and a feeling of inferiority regarding one's way of life (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014).

Social disempowerment has been shown to take place when a community loses respect for its traditional culture (Scheyvens, 1999); encourages unhealthy competition (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014); and exhibits jealousy and resentment between locals and among locals, elites and government (Scheyvens, 1999; Weng & Peng, 2014). Political empowerment, on the other hand, has arisen when there is a lack of institutional capacity to develop skills and training (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014). Autocratic leadership is also a sign of community disempowerment when community members are not involved in decision-making and residents have little or no say over the way tourism ventures operate (Scheyvens, 1999; Weng & Peng, 2014).

In summary, empowerment of women in tourism has theoretically happened through decision-making (Annes & Wright, 2015; Tran & Walter, 2014); becoming

independent and implementing hope (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; McMillan et al., 2011); taking control of others (Annes & Wright, 2015); and having the ability to negotiate power and ask others to join them and help them to achieve their goals. However, becoming empowered through tourism is difficult for women, particularly in patriarchal and capitalist societies (Annes & Wright, 2015; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012).

To continue to build support for this study, the remainder of the literature review is dedicated to a discussion of the tourism industry in Iran, particularly Ramsar, which is the context for this dissertation, as well as the status of Iranian women in general and in tourism.

### **Tourism in Iran and Ramsar**

Located at the intersection of civilizations along the Silk Road and surrounded by waters and deserts, Iran encompasses diverse climates and cultures. Coastal, mountainous, and desert climates of Iran as well as 21 UNESCO World Heritage sites provide multiple tourism attractions for the country.

Iran is a country whose history began some 10,000 years ago. Over that time period, tribes, languages, dialects, cultures, and religions (e.g., Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam) appeared and disappeared. As an example, the Achaemenid Empire (550BC to 330BC), whose territory stretched from what is now known as India to Egypt, was the most glorious civilization in Iran's history (Encyclopedia Iranica, 2017). Following the entrance of Islam (651 AC), Iran embraced a new culture that introduced mosques, schools, and urban spaces with Islamic design.

Contemporary Iran inherited cultural assets that reinforce the different historical eras of Iran. During the Pahlavi era (1925-1979) Iran experienced the beginnings of industrialization and modernization. It was characterized by the presence of trains, factories, and a bureaucratic system. During this same time women were forcefully unveiled, which for many was humiliating. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 fundamentally changed the economic, political, social, and cultural assets that previously existed in Iran. The Revolution along with the invasion of Iraq, one of the bloodiest wars in the history of the twentieth century (Karsh, 2014), thwarted Iran's economic development, particularly its tourism industry. Tourist arrivals significantly dropped from 680,000 in 1987 to 9,300 in 1990 (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2015).

Today, Iran has a population of around 79 million. It's mostly government owned and managed hydrocarbon, agriculture, and service sectors play key roles in the country's economy (World Bank, 2017). The same can't be said of tourism: the direct contribution of travel and tourism to Iran's GDP was 2.5% in 2015 and most (93%) of it was generated through domestic tourists (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2016). The small number of international tourists mainly comes from neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman.

Popular destinations in Iran include Ramsar County, which draws tourists because of its natural assets, including Khazar Sea and its forests. In 2015, Ramsar, a small coastal city within the County, and its neighboring mountainous villages (e.g., Javaher Deh), hosted around 1,800,000 tourists. The peak seasons for the area are spring/summer and national holidays, which are held throughout the year. With a population of around 74,000, nearly half of whom are women, Ramsar province's main sources of income are

agriculture and tourism. Local residents rent their homes to and provide food and handicrafts for tourists. Many are employed by hotels, guest houses, and travel agencies. According to Ramsar Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, nearly 1,100 women work in tourism. This number only includes women who benefit from health insurance, however. There is no data about the number of women who work informally in tourism. According to a different source, the Ramsar Tourism Organization (2016), approximately 2,100 individuals work in Ramsar's hotels and restaurants; one-third are women. A similar gender gap in tourism-based employment exists in Ramsar province and throughout Iran.

### **Women in Iran**

Iranian women represent approximately one-half of the country's population and hold different social, economic, and political statuses, which have been affected primarily by the political climate in Iran (i.e., before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979). After the Revolution in 1979, Iranian women shifted from unpaid agriculture production and carpet manufacturing jobs to more professional occupations in engineering, medicine, business management, and transportation (i.e., taxi drivers); the opposite of women in other developing countries where they are employed in manufacturing as cheap, flexible labor (Bahramitash, 2009). Further, Iranian women's literacy rate and level of participation in higher education increased. The literacy rate for women was 17% in 1966, increased to 80% in 2006, but continued to lag behind men, which had a rate of 89%. Their participation in higher education also increased to the point where, today, it exceeds the number of male applicants, students and graduates (Aryan, 2012). There are

two primary reasons for this change. First, the emergence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), whose concern was women's issues, as well as their dissemination of information through media, which supported interaction between women and men (Farhadpour, 2012). The actions and propaganda of NGOs are thought to have contributed to the greater participation of women in higher education. Second, women believed that a university degree would provide an opportunity for social freedom, and allow them to postpone marriage, leave home, and increase their skills (Rostami-Povey, 2012). Unfortunately, their beliefs did not translate in to reality. In 2013 women held only 19% of the teaching positions at universities and few were offered senior administrative positions (World Economic Forum, 2013).

While women have increasingly constituted a larger share of the economic sector (9.5% in 1956 compared to 15.5% in 2006; Bahramitash, 2009), the same trend has not been evidenced in the political sector. Iranian women have been involved in politics since 1890 when they attended street demonstrations against a Tobacco company run by a British company. The demonstrations evolved in to different movements, particularly with the influence of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979), whose efforts focused on women's education and health, unequal marriage and divorce laws, and the right to vote (Rostami-Povey, 2012). It was through the efforts of women who demonstrated and served in the government as minister and senator that a woman's right to vote was approved in 1963 (Rostami-Povey, 2012). Since then, however, little progress has been made in the political sector.

Today, few women are policy/law makers (women occupy only 6 of the 94 seats in Iran's congress; World Economic Forum, 2016) or ministers in government (women



have 10 of the 90 ministerial positions; World Economic Forum, 2016). And, women constituted only 18% of the labor force in Iran in 2014 (World Bank, 2017). The fact that women comprise a small share of the labor force is associated with a lack of social support and confidence in women's ability to lead, which is internalized by women; limited skills and knowledge about how to obtain a job; perception that completion of household chores is a woman's job; and societal norms (e.g., "men are the breadwinners" and "women have/should not attend senior managerial meetings") (Jazani, 2002 cited in Ketabi, Yazdkhasti, & Farokhi-Rastabi, 2003; Moghadam, 2013; Safiri, 1999 cited in Ketabi et al., 2003).

Iranian women's legal status must also be noted. They are treated as second-class citizens, which is reflected in Iran's discriminatory laws (Moghadam, 2013) that are rooted in Islamic rules reinforcing patriarchy and suppression of women. For example, based on Islamic law, women are required to cover their hair and body in public, and married women must defer to their husbands who have the right to forbid their wife's pursuit of a job, education, travel, and change of place of residence (Aryan, 2012). Recently, however, Iranian law has changed for the positive. For instance, during the 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament (1997-2005), 13 female members of Parliament raised the age of marriage for girls from puberty (i.e., 9) to 13 years of age and removed a ban on the travel of young women abroad for those with a state scholarship (Moghdam & Haghghatjoo, 2016). Further, Islamic law that previously banned women from initiating a divorce was removed in 1973, and women were given the right to serve as judges in lower level courts in the 1990s (Moghadam, 2013). Despite some advances there continues to be inequality

in Iranian women's social and economic lives. Understanding this inequality requires documenting women's perception of empowerment.

### **Empowerment of women in Iran.**

According to Ketabi et al. (2003), empowerment in Iran is defined as a process in which women gain awareness about their needs and strengthen their courage and abilities in order to reach their goals. It is also defined as individual development that enables persons to make free choices based on their desire (Shaditalab, 2002). Farokhi (1994, cited in Ketabi et al., 2003) summarized empowerment of women as overcoming illegitimate embarrassment, and gaining self-confidence and the ability to challenge problems and find solutions. Iranian literature about women's empowerment has focused on women from various social and economic backgrounds including, but not limited to, female heads of households, and rural and urban women benefitting from governmental plans or organizations (e.g., small loans, Emam Khomeini Relief Committee).

Referring to empowerment as a multi-dimensional process, Shakuri, Rafatjah, and Jafari (2007) studied female heads of households in Tehran benefitting from the Emam Khomeini Relief Committee, which provided them with educational (e.g., psychological health and literacy) and financial (e.g., monthly pension, loans for entrepreneurs) programs. The researchers documented that indicators of empowerment included psychological (e.g., self-esteem, ability to make changes in life, self control when facing problems, participation in making decisions for the family); social (attitude towards women's roles inside and outside the household in terms of employment and attitude toward participation in social activities); and economic (e.g., income, ability to repay loans, investments) dimensions. They also recognized that programs offered by the

Emam Khomeini Relief Committee had few impacts on the empowerment of women: women who used entrepreneurial services from the Committee were economically and psychologically empowered, but those who earned a pension or received temporary services were not empowered.

Rahmani, ZandRazavi, Rabani, and Adibi (2008) investigated the role of small loans in empowering women living in Poshtud Village in Kerman, Iran. At a micro level they found that women were economically empowered through an increased ability to manage financial risks, obtain employment, and increase their investments, all of which led to less poverty. From a meso level, women were socially empowered due to their attitude towards participation in social teams; trusting individuals' friends and institutions like the Village council; and respecting values and norms such as honesty and the need to accept support for resolving a problem.

Education, health, access to economic resources, and removing gender discrimination in the job market, having legal ownership rights, and removing traditional beliefs have also been found to increase women's empowerment (Ketabi et al., 2003). In rural contexts, where women are actively involved in agricultural practices, empowerment facilitators are linked to participation in production cooperatives to learn production skills, collective money investment, participation in volunteer activities, collaboration with neighbors, women's satisfaction with their husbands and his family, a smaller number of children, awareness about business in the community, and participation in a governmental institution and educational programs (Kalantari, Shabanali Fami, & Soroush Mehr, 2010).

Failure of women to be empowered is related to their lack of access to education, employment, and skills as well as extreme dependency on their husband before becoming the household head (Shakuri, Rafatjah, & Jafari, 2007). Failure to be empowered is also linked to the inability to talk in public and lack of motivation for collaborative economic activities (Kalantari et al., 2010). The patriarchic dynamics in Iran have acted as a barrier to the empowerment of women, particularly those who are vulnerable female heads of households. Society's denial of women who do not have a husband results in limiting their social networks and eventually removing them from society (Shaditalab, Vahabi, & Varmarzyar, 2005). Raised up and having lived in a patriarchic culture, some women have internalized the gendered division of labor so much so that even those women who are the head of their household believe that men should be primarily responsible for economic activities and that they do not have the agency to control their destiny (Shaditalab, Vahabi, & Varmarzyar, 2005).

### **Tourism development and empowerment of women in Iran.**

Few researchers have addressed tourism development and the empowerment of women in Iran. Those who have studied the issue used a research design informed by Scheyvens (1999) and with a population of rural women. From an economic perspective, results indicated that tourism has provided job opportunities, income, and variation in income for women (Amiri, 2011; Jomeepour & Kiumarsi, 2012; Khajehshahkuie, Khoshfekar, & Karimi, 2012; Khani, 2012; Sajadi & Ahmadi, 2013; Vosoughi & Ghasemi, 2014). In some regions women were able to move from their family farms and to create their own job or be employed in tourism-related businesses (Ghaniyan, Ghadiri-Masum, Motiei-Langrudi, & Zarafshani, 2010; Imeni-Gheshlagh, Khani, & Hashemi, 2012). Due

to their economic independency, women were able to take control over their income as well (Amiri, 2011). Tourism has led to entrepreneurial activities such as handicraft-making (e.g., weaving rugs, making traditional shoes and clothes) and cooking home-made foods (Imeni-Gheshlagh et al., 2012; Vosoughi & Amiri, 2014). It has also resulted in women being able to take risks and to build their self-confidence, creativity, and innovation (Heydari et al., 2014; Imeni-Gheshlagh et al., 2012). Compared to women who live in tourism destinations, women who live in rural areas that are not regarded as tourism destinations have not managed to access economic benefits and build their psychological strengths (Imeni-Gheshlagh et al., 2012; Yasouri & Vatankhah-Kluzari, 2015).

In terms of the social dimensions of empowerment, women's professional and technical skills have improved following educational programs related to tourism. These educational programs have not only taught women how to price their products and services and conserve the natural environment (Vosughi & Ghasemi, 2014), they've also helped women to be more effective, have control over their life, and be an extrovert, which is reflected in their tendency to attend group meetings (Vosughi & Ghasemi, 2014; Heydari et al., 2014). A change in perspective regarding women's social and economic roles has been noted as another significant contribution of tourism to women's empowerment (Khani, 2012; Vosughi & Ghasemi 2014). In the patriarchic and Islamic society of Iran, there is a gendered division of labor: women are expected to "serve" at home by doing household chores whereas men are expected to be breadwinners and to take control of family life. Women are also expected to minimize their time outside the home as well as their interactions with strangers. Considering these gender dynamics,

tourism has paved the way for women to extend themselves outside the home by interacting with tourists, selling their products, and generating income, just like men (Amiri, 2011). Tourism has also raised awareness of the capabilities of women in several villages (Khani, 2012). Women have become entrepreneurs through production of traditional handicrafts (Jomeepour & Kiumars, 2012). These positive consequences have not been documented in all destinations, however. Researchers have also documented a lack of interest in and awareness about how to create a social women's group to support local women's interest in raising money for tourism businesses. Lack of interest to do team works has been seen as a barrier for women's participation in tourism (Amiri, 2011; Jomeepour & Kiumars, 2012), but does not mean that women do not have freedom to participate.

Reviewing the literature about empowerment of Iranian women through tourism revealed that researchers have generally ignored political aspects of empowerment and failed to document the impact of tourism development on women. In addition, while several authors have noted that tourism contributed to the economic empowerment of women, it is not clear whether tourism has been able to contribute to diminishing, for example, gender inequality in wages (Khani, 2012). Third, Iranian scholars have applied quantitative, not qualitative, methods to explore the empowerment of women in a tourism context. And, they have not focused on exploring women's perceptions of their experience about empowerment, specifically in the context of tourism. Meanwhile, women are participating in tourism practices in several tourism destinations in Iran and there is little to no data about whether tourism practices have contributed to their empowerment based on their needs, expectations and perceptions.

## **Summary**

A great deal of research has been conducted on empowerment, yet that which has focused on women in developing countries has failed to account for the unique context of tourism development. Further, the frameworks guiding empowerment research have been drawn from studies conducted in the West, not developing countries such as Iran where women exist within a patriarchal society.

## **Study Purpose and Research Questions**

In order to obtain a more holistic measure of empowerment and generate practical strategies for improving benefits for women living in an area impacted by tourism development, I conducted a qualitative study with women living in the Ramsar region of Iran. The purpose of my study was to uncover women's perspective on empowerment and the degree to which tourism development may have affected their perspective. The research question I answered was: What are women's perspectives on empowerment? I expected the results of this study to contribute to: (a) further development of a theoretical framework for and practical understanding of empowerment, and (b) a template for individuals (e.g., tourism operators, tourism planners, tourism practitioners, tourists, and even the Iranian government) responsible for promoting sustainable tourism that improves the local capacities of women to achieve a decent quality of life.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The first section of this chapter focuses on five perspectives of empowerment, with greater attention given to the work of scholars in women's studies. Following the first section is a review of the seminal literature on women and empowerment in Iran; tourism development; and tourism development, and empowerment. The chapter ends with a discussion about the relationship between tourism development and empowerment in Iran as well as a short discussion regarding the ways in which researchers and organizations have measured empowerment.

#### **Five Perspectives of Empowerment**

While there are various views of and definitions linked to empowerment, I limited the following review of research on empowerment to that which was produced by scholars in psychology, management, health studies, political science, and women's studies. The decision to delimit the review to these five perspectives was because they most closely align with the purpose of this study. A quick review of these perspectives is located in Table 2-1.

#### **Psychological perspective.**

Psychologists refer to empowerment as a multilevel process through which "people, organizations, and communities take mastery over their affairs" (Rappaport, 1987, p. 120). At an individual level, empowerment is thought to be manifested through having personally meaningful goals aimed at influencing the environment (Cattaneo &



Chapman, 2010); self-efficacy, which includes the belief that one can reach his or her goal (Holden & Evans, 2005); knowledge (Russel, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009); and competence or skills to do what is required to attain the goal (Christens, 2012). In a recent study of factors that contribute to psychological empowerment of older Koreans attending activities associated with information and communication technology (ICT); however, Hur (2016) found that psychological empowerment results from being interested in ICT and ICT activities, not individuals' competence or skills.

Table 2-1: Empowerment as defined by researchers in some of the social sciences

<b>DISCIPLINE</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>OC</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>SOURCE</b>
<b>General</b>	<i>To give official authority or legal power to, or to promote the self-actualization or influence of.</i>	x		Merriam-Webster, 2017
<b>Psychology</b>	<i>A process by which individuals, communities, and organizations gain mastery over issues.</i>		x	Rappaport, 1988
<b>Management</b>	<i>To share information with employees and provide them with the opportunity to feel comfortable, and to remove hierarchical structures.</i>		x	Blanchard, Carlos, & Randolph, 2001
<b>Health Studies</b>	<i>A social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society.</i>		x	Wallerestien & Brenstein, 1988
	<i>A social process of recognizing, promoting and enhancing people's abilities to meet their own needs, solve their own problems, and mobilize the necessary resources in order to feel in control of their own lives."</i>		x	Gibson, 1995
<b>Political Science</b>	<i>An approach for development that places emphasis on autonomy in community decision-making, local self-reliance, direct democracy and social learning.</i>	x		Friedmann, 1992
	<i>The descriptive representation of minority groups in political activities.</i>	x		Banducci, Donova, & Karp, 2004
<b>Women's Studies</b>	<i>The processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability.</i>		x	Kabeer, 1999
	<i>A process through which "women achieve increased control over public decision-making.</i>		x	Longwe, 2002

*OC: Outcome-oriented definition; PR: Process-oriented definition*

Modified from Aghazamani and Hunt (2017, p. 335)

In a group or collective context, the process of empowerment involves the creation of interactive relationships that lead community members to learn from each other and the creation of a sense of community (Rossing & Glowaki-Dudka, 2001). The process also includes social support, which occurs when community members provide tangible (e.g., shelter, money), emotional, and informational support (Ibanez, Khatchikian, Buck, Weisshaar, Abush-Kirsh, Lavizzo, & Norris, 2003). Social support enhances communities' capacity to promote involvement and foster interdependence, components of empowerment that enable people to make their voice heard and to gain control over their own life (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002).

In 1995 Zimmerman introduced an empowerment framework that has been widely applied in a community psychology context. It introduces variables embedded in three different constructs, all of which measure psychological empowerment at an individual level. Zimmerman's main goal in introducing the framework was to facilitate development of empowerment theory and provide a measurement for psychological empowerment and disempowerment in various contexts. The three interrelated constructs addressed in Zimmerman's framework are intrapersonal (i.e., individuals' perceptions of their strengths and efficacies); interactional (i.e., individual's knowledge and understanding of the resources that are available in the surrounding environment); and behavioral (i.e., actions taken by the individual in regard to the environment) (see Figure 1).

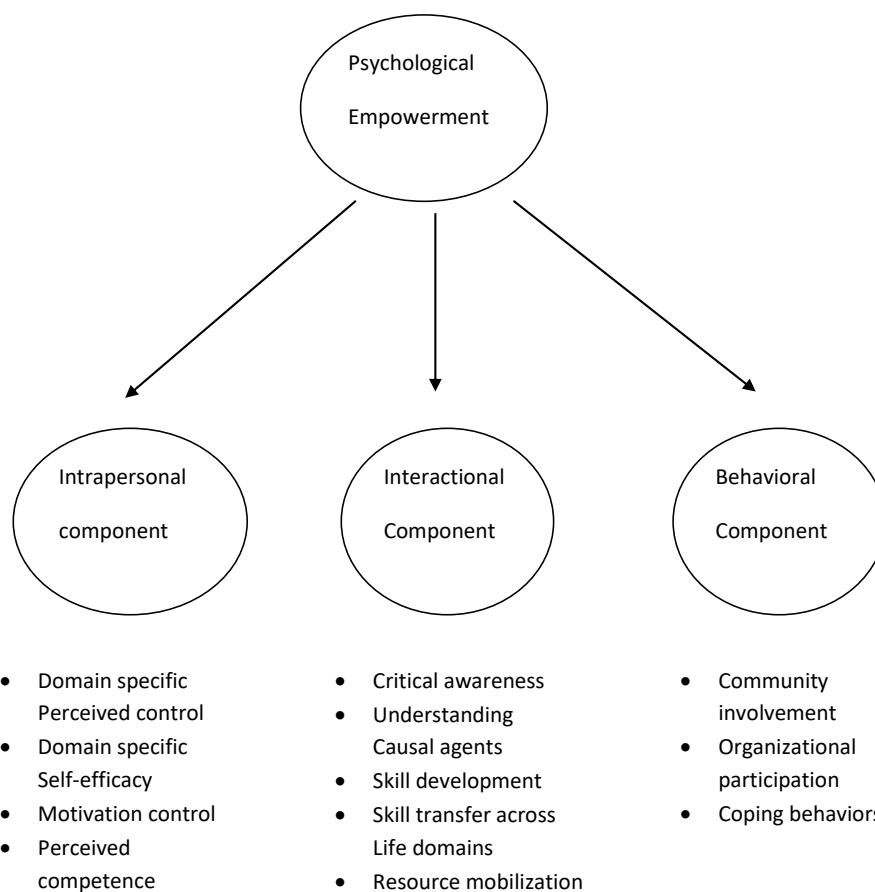


Figure 1: Psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995)

Contradictory results related to Zimmerman's (1995) framework have been reported. Researchers have found no or a weak relationship (Peterson, 2014) while others have noted significant relationships. For example, studying 296 American women who were in recovery from substance use, Hunter, Jason, and Keys (2013) found that there were significant positive relationships between the three constructs: women's self-perception was more strongly related to their knowledge of resources than their

participation and participation was more strongly related to knowledge than to self-perception.

### **Management perspective.**

From a management perspective, the empowerment of employees is of interest because employees are considered essential to a company's success. A well-cited scholar, Spreitzer (1995), addressed psychological empowerment in the workplace. He developed and validated a psychological empowerment measurement that involved meaning (i.e., the employee's values and its accordance with his/her role at work); competence (i.e., employee's capability of doing the job); self-determination (i.e., employee's ability to make choices in initiating and processing actions); and impact (i.e. employee's meaningful influence at work). Spreitzer pointed out individual characteristics—self-esteem or self-worth and locus of control—and work context, including information about the organization's mission and performance and reward structure, were antecedents of the psychological empowerment of employees.

Blanchard and his colleagues (2001) suggested employee empowerment involves three steps: the manager liberally sharing information with employees to help create a sense of ownership, setting up understandable boundaries that make employees feel comfortable and challenged, and having managers develop teams that eventually replace existing hierarchical structures. Adopting these steps leads to the psychological empowerment of employees (Huang et al., 2010; Maynard, Gibson, & Mathieu, 2012; Spreitzer, 1995; Wallace et al., 2011); job satisfaction; commitment to the organization (Chiang & Jang, 2008); and creativity (Sun, Zhang, Qi, & Chen, 2012).

**Health perspective.**

In Health Studies, empowerment is defined as “a social-action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice” (Wallerstein, 1992, p. 198). Alternatively, disempowerment is linked to living in poverty and through lack of economic/political power, social support, resources, and more (Wallerstein, 1992). Disempowerment results in a lack of control over destiny and often ends in disease.

Laverack (2005) focused on how to empower communities through public health promotion programs. He argued community participation in decision-making and in organizational structures, problem assessment, local leadership, resource mobilization, ability to ask why, program management, and relationship with an outside agent could lead to empowerment. Once empowered, community members can overcome addictive behaviors such as smoking and drinking, lose weight (Hur, 2006), and gain control over health and life decisions (Laverack & Labonte, 2000). Empowerment can also be a helpful tool for care-givers who, when empowered, may discover the reality of the disease their patient is facing, critically analyze their strengths and resources, advocate for their patient and learn how to interact with the health care system, and take control of their situation through perseverance and persistence (Gibson, 1995). MacPhee and his colleagues (2011) found that Canadian nurses attending a formal leadership program felt empowered through perceived self-confidence in doing their jobs; discovering new forms of leadership (e.g., involving other colleagues in decision-making); and accessing information and practicing what they learned in the program. Similarly, Slatyer,

Williams, and Michael (2015) found that nurses who perceived they were being helpful to patients felt empowered while those who perceived they were helpless, in distress and exhausted felt disempowered.

### **Political science perspective.**

From this perspective empowerment happens in two primary ways: when members of minority groups engage in political decision-making processes (Weissberg, 1999) and when they develop critical capabilities through analyzing economic, social, and political issues, learning to cope with difficulties, and participating in political debates that lead to political awareness (deShalit, 2004). In terms of the first example, an increase in minority groups' participation, particularly at the local and governmental level (Khan, 2011; Morel, 2016), can create positive attitudes towards government and increased knowledge about political issues (Banducci et al., 2004). This notion of empowerment has been challenged, however. Spence and McClerking (2010) revealed that African American's participation diminished in American states where African American mayors were in charge for a long time. They argued the decline in participation was due to strategies that discouraged members of minority groups from voting.

Empowerment may also give power to disadvantaged groups; women, for example, may be able to present their perspectives in political arenas. The degree to which empowerment works for women, however, may vary based on geographic region or culture. In Catalonia, Spain, regulation reformations were implemented to involve women in political parties, but in the end were ineffective. Verge and Fuente (2014) interviewed women who were members or leaders of their political parties. They found that gendered rituals (e.g., males citing their male counterparts rather than the females

who introduced the idea); men's scrutiny of women's competencies; gendered informal sanctions (e.g., women in high ranking positions are rumored to have sexual affairs with male selectors); informal networking (e.g., males make decisions outside of the formal political environment such as in bars and restaurants); and time (e.g., women are not able to attend late meetings or informal networking meetings due to family responsibilities) negatively impacted women's empowerment.

### **Women's studies perspective.**

Women studies scholars have addressed empowerment holistically. Some have addressed empowerment as a tool for giving power to women who are discriminated against, oppressed, and/or suffer from poverty (Afshar, 1998; Kabeer, 1999; Moghadam, 2007; Narayan, 2005). From this perspective, empowerment is considered essential for women who lack the power to influence their life. Empowerment is also considered to be an agent for change and, ultimately, decision-making and the ability to influence others as well as the ability to access resources and increase awareness about unequal and discriminatory status. For Kabeer (1999), empowerment involves earning the "ability to make choices" and thus "entails change" (p. 13). Empowerment, she suggested, is comprised of three interrelated dimensions: Agency, which refers to making choices and putting them into effect; resources (e.g., education, employment) that enable decision-making; and achievements, which represent the consequences of making choices. There are four types of agency: Passive agency—when a person has just one choice to make; Active agency—when a person has a couple of choices to make; Effective agency—when a person implements his or her roles and responsibilities; and Transformative agency—when a person challenges restrictive and subordinating situations. With respect to

women, transformative agency is practiced when women “question, analyze, and act on the structures of patriarchal constraints in their lives” (p. 15).

Longwe (2002) argued empowerment includes welfare, having access to resources, conscientization, mobilization, and control, not necessarily in that order. Welfare refers to women’s improved status in terms of basic needs such as nutritional status, income, and shelter. Access involves gaining access to water, land, markets, skill training, or information. Conscientization represents women’s understanding of discriminatory practices and rules. Mobilization includes women’s collective action against discriminatory practices and rules. And, control involves women making decisions about unequal access to resources.

Building off of Foucault’s four shapes of power (i.e., containing power over, power to, power with, and power from within), Rowlands (1997) defined empowerment as a process that contains inclusive decision-making (power over), awareness and influence making (power to and power with), and ability making (power from within). Emphasizing the interaction between individuals and their environment, Rowlands described three dimensions of empowerment through which empowerment is manifested: personal, relational, and collective. The personal dimension of empowerment refers to developing qualities such as self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of agency, sense of self in a wider context, and dignity to overcome “internalized oppression.” The relational dimension of empowerment involves “developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it” (p. 15). It involves the ability to negotiate, to communicate, to get support, to defend self/rights, sense of self in relationship, and dignity. The third dimension, collective empowerment, includes when



individuals collectively work together to achieve their goal. When evaluating the influence of a health program on women in Honduras, Rowlands found that women acknowledged an increase in their self-confidence and self-esteem (personal empowerment). They noted that the program provided grounds for women to be understood by their husbands, treat their children well, and become assertive (relational empowerment). The program did not contribute to women's collective empowerment, which the women believed was due to the structure of the program. The program did not allow women to work together and become responsible for their lives.

Addressing ignorance regarding the context in which women's oppression, suppression, and subordination occur, Narayan (2002) offered a conceptual framework to measure empowerment of poor people in her book, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*. She argued that empowerment is a relational concept that should be contextualized in the setting in which the poor's access, influence, control, and participation are curtailed. The two building blocks of her framework involve opportunity structure and agency of the poor. Opportunity structure is associated with institutional climate and social and political structures. It requires removing formal (i.e., laws and legislative regulations and practices) and informal (e.g., superiority and social exclusion) institutional barriers that have caused unequal status through access to information; participation (e.g., in debates, budget formation); accountability (making officials and private sector answerable for the policies and actions they take); and local organizational capacity (collectively mobilize resources to achieve goals). Agency is associated with individual assets (e.g., material such as land and financial assets) and individual capabilities (i.e., good health, education, productive or life-enhancing skills), as well as

collective assets (e.g., having voice, representation, collective identity, solidarity) and capabilities. Based on this framework, the development outcomes would be provision of basic services (i.e., access to health, education, water and road); pro-poor market development (e.g., fair access to markets); improved local governance (e.g., increase citizen access to information); and improved national governance (e.g., reflecting citizen feedback in budget making, and access to justice and legal aid such as expanding poor people's access to justice).

### **Women and Empowerment in Iran**

Iranian scholars have addressed empowerment among rural and urban women who have joined a group, are heads of households, or have received financial support from governmental or non-governmental organizations. They've found that one of the ways Iranian women reach out for help is through joining local small loan boxes groups. Women who know each other create local small loan boxes to increase their access to loans and distribute the financial aid fairly among themselves. Women gather weekly or monthly to determine who should receive a loan and to hand it to the recipient. While these loans are expected to improve women's status and empower them, women may not necessarily become empowered. Rahmani, ZandRazavi, Rabani, and Adibi (2008) who evaluated empowerment at micro, meso and macro levels, found that small loan boxes in Poshtroud village, Kerman, had contributed to economic, social, and psychological empowerment of rural women who were mainly homemaker household heads. They reported that active (i.e., attended meetings, participated in team work, and returned loans on time) members of the boxes group who had received small loans were economically

empowered. They used their loan to start small business such as raising mushrooms, baking, and growing barberry. At a meso level, women exhibited signs of being socially and psychologically empowered. They were willing to work in teams, and be responsible, honest, and reliable, which was referred to as social empowerment. Psychologically, women who benefited from boxes were hopeful about their social life. However, small loans did not result in cultural empowerment. Women were unable to divest/control their household chores (e.g., harvesting dates, milking livestock, and washing dishes and clothes). The authors associated the inability of women to become culturally empowered to the patriarchic culture in Iran which has deep roots in the local culture and religion.

While small credit loans are considered a powerful means of empowering women, Shakouri, RafatJah, and Jafari (2008) found they may be less effective than believed. Surveying 229 women, they found that female heads of households who had received economic support from the Emam Khomeini Relief Committee in Tehran had low levels of empowerment. Most of the women had low self-esteem, and many were not able to influence their life and thus were not able to change their status quo. However, they did acknowledge that they have a role in decision-making in their household. Socially, women did not see any difference between themselves and men in terms of employment. If they did not attend social activities it was because of a lack of awareness and cultural sensitivity regarding women's responsibility for their household, particularly those who are divorced.

Surveying 256 women living in rural Zanjan, Iran, Khani and Ahmadi (2009) documented that women's limited education was associated with low expectations for participation in decision-making and limited awareness of their legal rights. Results also

highlighted that economically active (e.g., involved in agricultural activities) women were more likely to participate in economic decision-making at home, despite the fact that many were not paid by their husband for the work they did on their family farm, nor did they have control over the household's income. Women who were economically active also were more likely to expect to contribute to the decision-making at home.

In a study conducted with rural women in Marvdasht, Fars province, Iran, Koulaie and Taheri (2012) found that women who had high school or more advanced degrees were more likely to have agricultural and industrial skills, participate in politics, vote, invest money and estimate interest, and believe that their main role is to be active in society, not in the house. Their results related to participation in rural development contradict the results reported by Koulaie and Taheri (2012). Based on the results of their study, the researchers suggested that empowered women do not have traditional perspectives (i.e., women should stay home) and that such perspectives can be altered through empowering women.

The prevailing patriarchic culture in Iran is not just limited to rural areas. Several Iranian scholars have investigated the relationship between demographic features such as education and employment and women's power in the household. In a study involving 122 women and 89 men working for Tehran University, Lajevardi (1998) found that education, job status, and gender significantly contributed to the acceptance of women's participation in the power structures of the family (in Saroukhani, 2005). In the traditional and patriarchic Iranian culture, the more women are educated and have a job, particularly if close to their husband's job in terms of social status, the more they are considered one of the power cores in the family and can make decisions (Saroukhani,

2005). A study done in three neighborhoods in Northern and Southern Tehran revealed that the more women were educated and employed, the more democratic<sup>1</sup> the family became (Mahdavi & Khosroshahi, 2003). Even men and women's mentality affects their perception of power structures at home. When women consider themselves inferior to men and define themselves with traditional factors, the power structure becomes male dominated (Saroukhani, 2005).

Abbasniya and Mosaffa (2012) addressed the political dimension of empowerment. Adopting Longwe's (2002) framework, which relates women's empowerment to taking control over their situation, they found women were less representative in managerial and leadership positions in governmental institutions and rural and urban councils. In terms of governmental institutions, few women were ministers or heads of departments during the reformist era (i.e., Khatami's presidency from 1996-2004), and the few who were in managerial positions had little influence because they were not able to vote. Abbasniya and Mosaffa concluded simply assigning positions to women does not necessarily give them a voice nor contribute to their agency.

Exploring social and economic empowerment amongst rural women in Rostam province, Iran, Ghanbari and Ansari (2016) found that economic empowerment includes attending income generating group activities, joining production unions, participation in credit boxes, being able to independently make investments, and attending philanthropic activities. Social factors included attending educational classes, becoming members of a governmental organization, and being aware of how to run a business. Splitting

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<sup>1</sup>A democratic family is defined as one in which husband and wife take part in decision-making.

household chores between members of the family; participating in decision-making at home; applying one's own skills; and demographic characteristics such as the husband's job, age, education, and the financial situation of the family were considered personal factors that affected empowerment. Ghanbari and Ansari realized that factors inhibiting women's empowerment included lack of job opportunities, education, legal support and communication networks, as well as family prejudices.

Also studying inhibitors to empowerment, Kalantari, Shabanali Fami, and Soroush Mehr (2010) surveyed 256 rural women in Hamedan Province, Iran. Using factor analysis they uncovered what they referred to as "empowerment inhibitors": personal-psychological (e.g., inability to express ideas in public, lack of self-confidence, literacy, and production skills); economic (i.e., women's lack of trust in each other, not accepting responsibility, lack of incentive to participate in group work); infrastructural (i.e., lack of access to roads between rural and urban areas and to sale markets); and social (government's lack of support for women entrepreneurs and lack of employment opportunities). To eliminate these inhibitors they suggested running educational workshops to improve women's health, child rearing, and project management skills, and increasing women's awareness about their community.

Farzizadeh, Motevaseli, and Taleb (2013) conducted one of the few studies focused on indigenous women's perception of women's empowerment. They used the World Bank's framework to address empowerment amongst women in Gilan province, northern Iran. Women perceived marriage and employment to be the most significant indicators for social and economic empowerment. Other indicators included spiritual capital, locational capital, and having a supporter. Secondary indicators were feeling

secure about their future, contentment (psychological capital), proficiency in the Persian language, existence of a man in the family, ability to reduce household expenses, and having an independent house for the bride (i.e., material capital). Indicators such as education, employment, and income were consistent with the findings from studies conducted outside of Iran (e.g., Kabeer, 2011; Narayan, 2002). The authors acknowledged establishment of political groups was not mentioned as an indicator of empowerment.

The same authors (i.e., Farzizadeh, Motevaseli, & Taleb, 2013) also looked for facilitators and barriers to empowerment. Social capital and being family-oriented, manifested in living close by, was one of the facilitators of empowerment. Living in close proximity to family members provided women with the opportunity to support each other, to visit family members, and to have someone watch their house in the summer when they go to the mountains. Cooperation in farm work was a second contributor to empowerment in that women were able to complete chores on their own farm and then go and work on other farms to earn more money. This cooperation was rooted in the trust they had toward other women in the same tribe. Safety, a third facilitator to empowerment, involved women's control over foreigners' existence in the village and having family ties provided a safe place in the village. Additionally, family support for their children, which often included building a house/accommodations and paying wedding expenses, as well as financial support for religious leaders in the village, contributed to the empowerment of women.

Barriers to women's empowerment included the belief that women do not need to obtain an advanced education or to learn job-related skills; marriage at a young age;

being unmarried; neighbors' gossip; discrimination against women, which has its roots in the preference for sons rather than daughters; and not providing women with a heritage. In addition, lack of information about how to promote a business; having a guardian who is unemployed or dealing with addiction; and living with a big family were barriers to women's empowerment.

In summary, the review of Iranian literature regarding empowerment and women revealed that most researchers have used surveys to gather data and parametric methods to analyze the data. Most did not identify which framework guided their research and their review of the literature was based on studies of empowerment conducted with non-Iranian women. Further, very few researchers have addressed the notion of empowerment with rural women living in an area impacted by tourism development.

### **Tourism Development**

The growing interest in the role of empowerment in tourism development has its roots in the discussions about whether tourism can be a passport to development. Since the 1960s, when tourism started booming globally, nations have dealt with the positive and negative effects of tourism. While nations were excited about the potential economic benefits of tourism development such as infrastructure development, an increase in foreign exchange and national Gross Domestic Product (Sharpley & Telfer, 2008), many did not recognize the potential negative effects of tourism development, including environmental degradation and ignorance towards and manipulation of the local culture, local communities' exclusion from decision-making, feelings of subordination, and the demonstration effect (de Kadt, 1976). An example of an unexpected positive effect has



been an increase in residents' feeling of pride, which occurs when tourists visit communities and interact with local residents (de Kadt, 1976).

In 1985, Murphy called for the participation of local residents in tourism development, which included policy and planning. Today these forms of participation are core tenets of sustainable tourism development as is the notion of empowerment. Without empowering local residents sustainable development is not achievable (Timothy, 2001). Sofield (2001) defined empowerment in the tourism development context as a multi-dimensional social process in which communities are provided with opportunities to learn, and to make and implement decisions, with consultation from outside expertise.

#### **Tourism development and empowerment.**

In tourism, the concept of empowerment has been forged based upon the findings of other disciplines. Following a comprehensive review of the literature, Aghazamani and Hunt (2017) defined empowerment as, "a multidimensional, context-dependent, and dynamic process that provides humans, individually or collectively, with greater agency, freedom, and capacity to improve their quality of life as a function of engagement with the phenomenon of tourism" (p. 3). Based on her studies of ecotourism benefits and costs, Scheyvens (1999) offered a theoretical framework highlighting both empowerment and disempowerment of local people and communities. Empowerment (or the benefits of tourism), she argued, is derived through employment, equal distribution of social facilities, participation in decision-making, and improved self-confidence. Disempowerment (or the costs of tourism development) is associated with unequal distribution of tourism income, disharmony between local communities, exclusion from decision-making processes, and the feeling of shame.

*Tourism development and empowerment in developed countries.* Boley, Maruyama, and Woosnam (2015) applied Scheyvens framework in Japan. They documented that Uzumi people felt more socially empowered (sense of connectedness to community, community spirit, involvement in community) than psychologically (feeling of pride, feel special, willingness to tell others about what they have, their unique culture, willingness to work to keep the city special) and politically (have a voice in decision-making, participate in tourism planning, sense of having an outlet to share their ideas) empowered. Boley and Johnson Geither (2016) found sense of pride, community cohesion, as well as economic opportunities to be signs of empowerment amongst residents of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Corridor in the United States. Participants felt pride in the Corridor and their communities. They started tourism initiatives, which strengthened their cohesion. However, there were also signs of social disempowerment in that some residents were ashamed that their culture was being used to make money, thus increasing conflict in the community. Land loss was another problem resulting from tourism development.

Applying the social, psychological, and political dimensions of Scheyvens' framework, Boley and McGehee (2014) developed and validated a framework they called the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS). They found that residents of three counties in Western Virginia were more psychologically (felt proud of tourism in the area) than socially (sense of connectedness to community) and politically (having voice and outlet to share their concerns) empowered. The RETS, which was based off of data collected in Western Virginia, has been important to the tourism industry for at least two reasons. First, tourism development organizations, whose aims include generating

benefits for local residents, needed to document these benefits for political and other reasons. Second, measuring residents' perception of their level of empowerment has enabled tourism organizations to estimate what their level of support may be for further development. Unfortunately, the RETS does not account for the economic dimension introduced by Scheyvens and it has not been validated in a wide variety of cultural contexts (Boley et al., 2015).

Sterzelecka, Boley, and Sterzelecka (2017) applied RETS in Poland. Their efforts revealed that residents were more psychologically (pride and self-esteem) than socially (increase in social cohesion) empowered. Yet, both their psychological and social empowerment led them to support tourism. There was no evidence of political empowerment. Sterzelecka et al.'s findings challenged the results of other studies, which have attributed support for tourism to the perceived economic benefits of tourism development.

Focusing on a gap in the literature about the discrepancies in empowerment between men and women, Boley, Ayscue, Maruyama, and Woosnam (2017) conducted a comparative study in the United States and Japan using the RETS framework. They found that women were more likely than men to become empowered through tourism in the United States. However, to their surprise, there was no difference between men and women regarding perceptions of empowerment in Japan.

***Tourism development and empowerment in developing countries.*** Scheyvens (1999) framework has been used by several tourism scholars in their research on empowerment in developing countries. For instance, Cole (2007) and Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernandez-Ramirez (2010) identified different types of empowerment when

addressing linkages between cultural tourism and empowerment of local communities in Indonesia and Ecuador. Overall, they found that cultural tourism practices have provided villagers with an identity that brings them pride and awareness about their culture. This has enabled villagers to make decisions about the promotion of tourism and whether to resist the state or the church.

Scheyvens and Russell (2012) examined the impacts of tourism development in Fiji on poverty alleviation through comparing small-and large-scale tourism enterprises. They applied Zhao and Ritchie's (2007) notion of empowerment, which involves providing opportunities and removing barriers for the poor to engage in decision-making. They found that both small-and large-scale tourism enterprises resulted in income for residents, although the income associated with small-scale enterprises was lower than income derived from large-scale enterprises, and access to loans was harder. Further, there was no job security in the large-scale enterprises and poor employment conditions in the small-scale enterprises. The country did not support small tourism enterprises. In both small and large scale enterprises locals were simply employees and not involved in tourism planning and development.

Applying Scheyvens' framework with residents living in a national heritage site in Fiji, Farrelly (2011) documented that the democratic approach to decision-making did not contribute to political empowerment of residents, likely because it was the antithesis of the traditional approach to decision-making, which includes rounds and rounds of long meetings led by the Chief or village leader. Additionally, lack of education, information, and exposure to the outside world resulted in limited community participation in meetings about tourism development and, ultimately, uninformed voting on the issue of

tourism development in their community. Overall, Farrelly found inclusive decision-making does not necessarily lead to political empowerment. He suggested applying traditional ways of decision-making and governance in rural communities instead of using an outsider model (such as Scheyvens' framework) to make decisions. In addition, he argued that empowerment must be considered central to in any process associated with, not just an outcome of, tourism development.

Ramos and Prideaux (2014) studied empowerment and the barriers to empowerment with residents of a Mayan village in Mexico. Their theoretical framework included economic (i.e., community control of economic resources, direct economic benefits for locals, maintenance of tourism earnings within the local community); psychological (i.e., group self-esteem, feeling capable of attending community activities and taking on new roles, pride in culture and traditions); social (i.e., enhancement of local equilibrium through tourism, local control over tourism, community participation in and sharing of benefits associated with tourism); political (i.e., political structure representative of the needs and interests of all community groups, full communal responsibilities and tourism services ownership, appropriate institutions for training in tourism finances and technical skills); and environmental (i.e., local ecotourism management, community conversation area and monitoring of communal areas, habitat rehabilitation for tourism) empowerment. In terms of barriers to empowerment (or disempowerment), Ramos and Prideaux (2014) suggested it occurs when tourism benefits are unequally distributed within the community or are accrued by individuals or businesses outside the community (economic). It also happens when: locals are not interested in continuing with tourism development; they feel inferior (psychological);

disharmony and conflict happens in the community (social); and there is a lack of autocratic leadership and tourism training programs (political), as well as awareness about impacts of tourism on the environment and control over the environment (environmental). The researchers found that younger members of the community felt economically, socially, politically, and environmentally disempowered while they were neutral in terms of psychological empowerment.

Han and his colleagues (2014) noted that government strategies and residents' interaction in a tourism destination in China had limited residents' access to productive land, natural resources, information, and participation in decision-making. They found that residents' socio-economic conditions had contributed to their disempowerment. Residents' illiteracy or lack of education, and their lack of family support, access to forest resources, and income also contributed to their disempowerment.

Knight and Cottrell (2016) used Rowland's (1997) power framework (i.e., four forms of power that highlight agency, collectivity, self-awareness, and domination) to guide their study of the intersection of tourism development and empowerment in four communities in Peru. Analysis of their interview data revealed that those who were not involved in tourism acknowledged the existence of non-generative empowerment (power over) (e.g., tour operators earned more benefits at the expense of other's well-being). Those who were involved in tourism highlighted generative empowerment through enhanced agency, collectivity and self-awareness.

Weaver (2010) introduced a new form of empowerment he called, "quasi-empowerment," or the final steps of the evolutionary process occurring in the relationship between tourism and indigenous peoples. He found that tourism has not only facilitated

indigenous peoples' formal control (e.g., restricting visitation to residential areas) over their properties, but it has also extended their control over their assets through enforcing laws that formally recognize their rights over their lands, whether they are visited by tourists or not.

### **Tourism development and empowerment for women.**

Several researchers have focused on the intersection of tourism development and women's empowerment, including women in decision-making (Annes & Wright, 2015; Tran & Walter, 2014); becoming independent and generating hope (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; McMillan et al., 2011); and the ability to control others (Annes & Wright, 2015). In practice, however, providing opportunities for women to become empowered has been challenging, specifically in patriarchal and capitalist cultures (Annes & Wright, 2015; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). For instance, Nepalese women have been shown to be economically and socially, but not politically empowered through tourism (McMillan et al., 2011).

Becoming empowered politically is tedious in patriarchal and capitalist societies (Annes & Wright, 2015; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012) because male-dominated power structures have prevented women from representing themselves and their communities. Ferguson (2011) found that economic empowerment (e.g., having a job or being independent) also does not guarantee political, psychological, and social empowerment of women. Other barriers to economic empowerment include scarcity of capital and lack of community control (Moswete & Lacy, 2015); inequities of social class and patriarchal norms that lead women to become dependent on men (Moswete & Lacy, 2015); lack of education and time (McMillan et al., 2011); limited access to childcare; and violence

against women (Tran & Walter, 2014). Culture can also be a barrier. In progressive societies women may be empowered in their quest to be economically independent whereas in patriarchal societies they can be disempowered through domestic violence and more (Cornwall, 2003).

*Tourism development and empowerment for women in Iran.* Few researchers have investigated the intersection of tourism development and empowerment of women in tourism destinations. Fewer still have studied the topic in rural areas in Iran. Exploring the participation of women and men in tourism activities in a rural tourism destination in Western Iran, Oraman, Ghaniyan, Ghadiri-Masum, Motiei-Langrudi, & Zarafshani (2010) found that women participated in economic activities such as making and selling handicrafts and foods and running stores beside their house so that they did not have to leave their house. Women indicated that they did this as a means to attain independence and to do something different. Men participated in tourism activities to create a positive image for tourists, help develop tourism in the region, transfer local culture to tourists, and become familiar with tourists and learn from them. The researchers argued that discrepancies in men and women's involvement in tourism activities highlighted the different status of men and women in Iranian society. Tourism had also changed women's role in the community in that women's responsibility in agricultural activities decreased and they became active in making other products. Khani (2012) compared men's and women's perception of tourism to better understand gender differences in Tehran's countryside—Suleghan. Results indicated that tourism contributed to an increase in women's awareness (the study did not indicate the focus of the awareness)



and social interactions. However, tourism did not decrease gender inequality or women's involvement in activities.

From an economic perspective, there were no differences between men and women in regard to employment, increase of prices, or the sale of land. However, women's perception was different from that of men in terms of tourism's impact on their income; this may be because men were more involved in the financial aspects of tourism. From a social perspective, men and women agreed that tourism had not devastated their traditions, public security, or social norms. Men were more likely to agree that tourism had positively influenced their quality of life, likely because they benefitted more from tourism. Also, men were more likely to be looking for a broadening of their social network, interaction with city and governmental organizations, and to increase their awareness. Women were looking for employment, independence, and the ability to acquire power in the family and change gender relations. From an environmental perspective, there was no difference between men and women in terms of perceptions of negative impacts of tourism (e.g., distraction, environmental degradation, increased trash). Perhaps because men are more likely to be out in public, they were more likely than women to agree that tourism had provided the community with public facilities. There was also a discrepancy between men and women in regard to the contribution of governmental organizations in tourism development. Men were more likely to agree that governmental organizations had contributed to the development of tourism in the community, which may be because they, not women, were in touch with the organizations.

Comparing a rural tourism village (Kandovan village) with a non-tourism village (Eskandan village) in North-Western Iran, Imeni-Gheshlagh, Khani, and Hashemi (2012) found that tourism had changed traditional attitudes towards women's involvement in activities taking place outside the home. Tourism development had incentivized women to do entrepreneurial activities and provided jobs for women. The researchers reported that more women were employed in the tourism industry in the tourism village than in the non-tourism village. In addition, they found an increase in rural people's income, the establishment of hotels, parking lots, communication services and more in the tourism village. Similarly, tourism contributed to the economic, cultural, and social empowerment of women in Ziyarat tourism village in North-Eastern Iran (Khajehshahkuie, Khoshfekr, & Karimi, 2012). Khajehshahkuie and his colleagues (2012) documented tourism had primarily contributed to the economic empowerment of women in the village. They had been provided with new job opportunities and income. Having a job in the tourism industry and, as a result, exposure to tourists changed their lifestyle and their perspective about the world and humans. Further, women's social awareness had increased as they became familiar with new lifestyles. The tendency to engage in activities outside their home and to have hope for the future were social signs of women's empowerment. Overall, they found that women were more economically than culturally and socially empowered. Khajehshahkuie and his colleagues suggested this finding was because economic empowerment is a priority. Social empowerment is least important because creating social networks takes time and cannot happen as fast as cultural change, which happens through changes in beliefs facilitated by social media. The level of importance attached to the various types of empowerment differed, however, based on age and

education: Young women were more empowered than older women and those who were educated were more economically empowered than those who were not educated. The researchers concluded that tourism can first contribute to economic empowerment of women and then contribute to their cultural and social empowerment.

Amiri (2011) also explored the role of tourism on the empowerment of women using Scheyvens' (1999) framework. She found tourism did not result in social cohesion and social engagement (social empowerment) in two rural tourism destinations in northern (Javaherdeh in Ramsar) and southwestern (EmamZadeh Baz in Bavanat) Iran. The primary reason was the domination of elites over tourism, which impacted women's ability to interact with tourists. In each destination one local family controlled the delivery of services and minimized opportunities for local women to interact with tourists. Even when the elites needed extra employees to provide services to tourists they recruited women from surrounding areas because of the negative attitudes of villagers towards local women serving strangers. Furthermore, women in the village did not know English and weren't able to communicate with tourists. Only residents of Javaherdeh village in Ramsar became empowered economically through tourism. In contrast, tourism in a rural area in Fuman, Northern Iran, did not experience an increase in jobs or entrepreneurial activities for women (Yasouri & Vatankhah-Kluzari, 2015). Although women were skilled in carpet weaving, making handicrafts and food, and tailoring, they were not able to use their skills or sell their products as a result of tourism development. Yasouri and Vatankhah-Kluzari (2015) suggested this finding may be due to several inhibiting factors, including: lack of participatory groups such as a union which could have created a sense of companionship, the lack of stores and fairs for selling products,

lack of investment, lack of packaging machines in the village, lack of women's awareness of tourists demands, lack of awareness about women's capacities, lack of access to appropriate roads, and women being prohibited from actively selling products.

Focusing on the notion of empowerment, Vosoughi and Ghasemi (2016) evaluated the impact of ecotourism on the social, economic, and psychological empowerment of rural women in Shibderaz village in Qeshm Island, Southern Iran, a conservation area for Hawksbill sea turtles. They found that conserving Hawksbill sea turtles had contributed to the empowerment of women from different aspects highlighted in Scheyvens' (1999) framework. Tourism development provided jobs, increased income, and improved women's business skills. It also contributed to changes in traditional views regarding women's work. Psychologically, women believed they influenced their own destiny, overcame their problems, and eradicated poverty. More participation in conservation had also increased their self-confidence. Their engagement in the conservation plan led to the belief that they are able to work outside the home, earning income by joining unions and making handicrafts, for instance. Tourism also incentivized them to engage in group work.

### **Efforts to Assess Empowerment**

One of the best examples of global efforts to empower women collectively is small credit programs that provide disadvantaged women in less developed countries with financial assistance. Hashemi, Schuler, and Riley (1996) evaluated the effects of small credit programs (e.g., Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) on the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Indicators for empowerment

included mobility (e.g., showing up in the market); economic security (e.g., owning land); ability to make small (e.g., ice cream for children) and large (e.g., daily food for the household) purchases; involvement in major decisions (e.g., house repair); relative freedom from domination by family members (e.g., money taken against her will); political and legal awareness (e.g., knowing the name of a parliament member); and participation in public protests and political campaigning (e.g., campaigning against unfair prices). They argued that involvement in credit programs contributed to the empowerment of women because women noted all of the indicators of empowerment.

The World Bank Group (WBG) has evaluated empowerment of women using a multi-level (i.e., household, community, and broader arena) measurement that addresses the following dimensions of empowerment: economic (women's control over household income); socio-cultural (e.g., mobility); familial/interpersonal (e.g., involvement in decision-making for the household); legal (e.g., knowledge of legal rights); political (e.g., knowledge of political system and means of access to it); and psychological (e.g., self-esteem) (cited in Malhorta, Schuler, & Boender (2002)<sup>2</sup>). The strength of this framework is that it encompasses a legal dimension, a construct that is not evident in other frameworks. In addition, unlike other international entities such as the United Nations (UN), the WBG has included a broader level of empowerment in its framework by addressing signs of empowerment beyond personal/household and community dimensions. For instance, the WBG takes women's positive image in the media into account when measuring empowerment. The weakness of this framework is its failure to

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<sup>2</sup> The examples represent household level.

address personal aspects of a woman separately from household structure. For example, “access to and control of family resources” or “relative contribution to family support” are indicators of empowerment at the household level. For women who are not married and living with family members this is problematic. They may have access to and control of their own individual resources and may not be expected to contribute to family support yet, based on the WBG’s framework, their level of empowerment may be low, which is inaccurate.

The United Nations Development Program developed a measure to evaluate women’s empowerment in 2004. The Gender Empowerment Measure focused on economic and political aspects of women’s empowerment. The Measure addressed the proportion of seats in parliament occupied by women; the proportion of female legislators, senior officials, managers, and professional and technical workers in the general economy; and the ratio of estimated female to male earned income. Since 2004, this measure has been applied by the United Nations to evaluate the status of women’s empowerment. However, this measurement has been criticized for its reductionist approach and its inability to holistically evaluate women’s empowerment. According to Syed (2010), the Measure emphasizes women’s economic and political empowerment from a macro level, only. Political participation only addresses “elites” who have enough resources (e.g., education) to accept parliamentary positions and does not include women’s unpaid work at home. The Measure is also secular in that it ignores the fact that various religions assign different values and roles for women and men. Despite this criticism, the Measure is a component of the Human Development Index, which is used by international organizations.

Researchers in less developed countries such as Pakistan, India, and Ghana have also studied empowerment. For instance, Chaudhary, Chani, and Perviz (2012) found that having secondary level education, employment, access to health facilities, and control over resources contributed to women's empowerment in Pakistan. Evaluating the impact of providing Muslim women in Chennai city in Tamilnadu, India with limited financial services, Jamal, Khadir, Raihana, and Sultana (2016) found that women who used the services became empowered. Specifically, economic empowerment (e.g., being self-employed, having savings, living in a concrete house); social empowerment (e.g., having educated children, living with family, attaining support from family to work); and knowledge-awareness empowerment (e.g., awareness of laws related to dowry, participation in last election, being aware of the age for voting) was revealed. Female Muslim home-based entrepreneurs gained materially, increased their self-confidence and self-reliance, and improved their communication skills. In addition, they were able to stand up for their rights and help others as well.

Ganle, Afriyi, and Segbefia (2015) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study of women's empowerment in Ghana. They focused on women's economic dependence on their husband, mobility, and self-confidence or assertiveness before and after receiving microcredits. The results were mixed. Women had obtained jobs and earned money, but were still dependent on their husband because they had limited control over their loan and had adopted low income-generating businesses. In addition, violence against women did not decrease and, in some cases, intensified. Team members or husbands morally, verbally, and physically assaulted women unable to pay their loan on time. On the other hand, some loan recipients' mobility increased, which in turn increased their self-

confidence; they became aware of the issues around them and did not need to get permission from their husband to go out of their home; and their participation in household decision-making increased. The results of this study reinforced that empowerment is context-dependent; one understanding of empowerment cannot be applied in every context (Alvi, 2005; Kabeer, 1999; Riger 1993; Sharma, 2008; Syed, 2010).

Recognizing that empowerment may be context dependent, Shields (1995) investigated women's perception of empowerment in Oregon, United States of America, using in-depth interviews with 15 women. These women perceived of empowerment as a process that involved developing a sense of self, which includes claiming their identity; developing self-value, self-acceptance and trust; obtaining the ability to take action; and developing a sense of connectedness to the community and one's sense of self.

Despite efforts to measure the effectiveness of empowerment programs and initiatives, there are issues that must be addressed when studying empowerment. For example, should empowerment be treated as an end or a means to an end (Narayan, 2005)? An instrumental perspective of empowerment suggests that attending a public meeting represents empowerment because it improves interactional skills (Narayan, 2005). Alternatively, an intrinsic perspective of empowerment implies that simply attending a public meeting represents an outcome or "end" measure of empowerment (Narayan, 2005). Thus, because both perspectives are valid, a researcher must make clear whether empowerment is evaluated from an instrumental perspective and, if so, utilize a measurement for investigating the improvement of skills. If empowerment is evaluated from an intrinsic perspective, meeting attendance needs to be considered (Narayan,



2005). Also, is empowerment a global value that all people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, deserve? And, what indicators should be considered when studying empowerment given that research has shown empowerment to be context-specific? In Bangladesh, for instance, women's mobility is a sign of empowerment while in Jamaica this is not the case (Narayan, 2005). Further, at what level should empowerment be measured. Research reviewed previously in this section suggested that empowerment should be studied at the individual, community, regional, even national governmental levels.

### **Summary**

While the powerful effect of culture and context on perceptions of empowerment has been documented, few scholars have explored women's perceptions of empowerment in different areas of the world. And, when they have, they have primarily used study instruments developed for a Western (e.g., USA) context. These same scholars have also adopted the notion that individuals who practice the same culture or religion, for example, are homogeneous and thus have the same perceptions of empowerment. This thinking is faulty (Simbar, Alizadeh, Hajifohghaha, & Dabiri, 2017). Additional limitations include the fact that empowerment has been investigated as an outcome rather than a process (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017), and that there are limited data about disempowerment. We do not know whether "disempowerment [is] simply the absence of empowerment, or a distinct concept with its own distinct characteristics" (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017, pp. 342-343).

In terms of the tourism literature associated with women's empowerment in Iran, most of the results have been based on studies built from Scheyvens' framework. Thus, the unique context of Iran, particularly its rural tourism destinations, and indigenous women's interpretation of empowerment were largely ignored. This has led to a glaring gap in the tourism and empowerment literature. Recognizing the importance and value of context-based empowerment research (Kabeer, 1999; Longwe, 2002; Mason, 2005; Narayan, 2005; Rappaport, 1987; Rowlands, 1997; Zimmerman, 1995), this study will uncover women's perspective on empowerment and the degree to which tourism development may have affected their perspective.

Ramsar as a study context is atypical of other areas in Iran, but typical of areas in Northern Iran. While the results cannot be generalized to all of Iran, the strength in focusing on Ramsar is to explore women's experiences in a small popular tourism destination where women have encountered and provided services to tourists.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

Information about the study context and the study design including descriptions related to the pilot study, samples, sampling method, methods of data gathering and data analysis are addressed in this chapter.

#### Study Context

With a population of 74,179, including 36,959 women and 37, 220 men, and 25,312 households in 2016 (Iran's Statistics Center, 2016 Census), Ramsar Province is a 730 Km<sup>2</sup> coastal region located alongside the Caspian Sea in Northern Iran. The region has a humid and moderate climate with a mean annual temperature of 17.3 degrees centigrade (Iran Meteorological Organization, 2018). Its main agricultural products include rice, wheat, beans, vegetables, citrus, apples, kiwis, hazelnuts, and walnuts. Handicrafts include chadorshab weaving<sup>3</sup>, namad maaly<sup>4</sup>, pottery, straw mats and basket weaving, wooden materials, and jajim weaving<sup>5</sup>. Nearly 85% of the population resides in urban areas within Ramsar Province. It is one of the most popular tourism destinations in Iran.

At the center of Ramsar Province, Ramsar, which is referred to as “Iran's Bride Town,” is among the most visited cities in Iran. It is called “Iran's Bride Town” because

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<sup>3</sup> The chadorshab is an outer garment woven by and worn by women. Made of cotton, wool and silk, it is tied around the waist to avoid moisture or is used as a bedcover or handbag.

<sup>4</sup> A traditional carpet made with wool through pressure, humidity, and heat, not through weaving.

<sup>5</sup> A simple carpet that females weave on a horizontal loom. The designs tend to vary with the imagination of the weaver.

of its beauty, which people associate with the mountains and the coast. According to Iran's Bureau of Statistics, approximately 1,200,000 domestic tourists visited Ramsar during Spring 2016. Prior to 1935, Ramsar was called Sakhtsar, meaning Hard Head. This name was given to the area because of the tough men who lived there and were able to resist cruel governors (Sajadi, 1999). The area was also known for its land, which was made of bole (i.e., very fine clay), making commuting around the region difficult (Sajadi, 1999).

When Reza Pahlavi (Reza Shah) became Iran's King in 1925 he, along with the National Parliament in Northern Iran, started construction projects to modernize Iran. During his reign (1925-1941) accommodations and services facilities, bureaus (e.g., police office, agriculture), and commercial and therapy properties were built. In 1931 he began to develop Ramsar in to a recreational region (Sajadi, 1999) with real estate, road projects and construction along its coastal areas. For example, the Ramsar Old Hotel, Ramsar's first accommodation facility; recreational facilities such as the Casino; Ramsar Boulevard; and a western style garden were built during the Reza Shah era. Ramsar Boulevard was a long street full of trees but then became a pedestrian road with connections to neighboring streets (Rangchiyan & Heidari, 1999). Villas were built around both sides of the Casino, and the Marble Castle along with other castles were built to accommodate royal families.

After Iran's World War Two (1941-1946) and the overthrow of Reza Shah, his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, continued to build and revitalize tourism destinations and facilities. The foundation of Ramsar Airport and the Khazar Coastal Motel were built in the 1940s. By 1953, a government building and mayor were installed. Having

accommodations, recreational services, natural resources and government oversight enabled Ramsar's efforts to become a domestic tourism destination. So, too, did the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of Importance in 1971, an event that brought together world leaders who reached an agreement to study, conserve, and use significant wetlands throughout the world. During this time period, which was the end of the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), the Iranian government focused on raising global awareness of Iran's culture and civilization and introducing Iran, including Ramsar, as a tourism destination (Javadi, 2014).

After the revolution in 1979, tourism development in Ramsar ceased. For example, due to enforcement of Islamic values and codes (e.g., wearing hejab, banning alcohol), the Casino went out of business, decorative female statues were destroyed (Rangchiyan & Heidari, 2009), and people, specifically women, were no longer allowed to wear swimsuits in public. By the 1990s, Iran went through a Construction Era. In Ramsar, several tourism plans were developed, but few were implemented. One exception was the Ramsar Tele Kabin or Green Ramsar City Recreational Complex, which was built in 2008. The Complex, which includes a hotel—Tele Kabin, stores, and recreational facilities (e.g., marine club, motor sports, and amusement park), has provided jobs for more than 100 women in Ramsar. According to the Bureau of Plans and Programs in Tourism Organization in Ramsar, plans for several tourism facilities (e.g., village, nature) were developed in Ramsar with the aim of supporting tourism infrastructure development. Current proposed projects include Markuh Castle Recreational Center, Garsemasar Heights, Javaherdeh Forest, Dalkhani Forest, Safarud Forest Park, Sefid Tameshk Castle Recreational Center, and Kaaj Ramsar (Ramsar Pine).

## **Philosophical Assumptions**

There are four philosophical assumptions linked to qualitative research—ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumption (Cresswell, 2013). The ontological assumption in this study was that the nature of reality is associated with what participants view differently about the experience (Moustakas, 1994 cited in Cresswell, 2013). The epistemological assumption, which pertains to the relationship between the researcher and the study participants, includes the engagement of the researcher and participants and recognizes that the researcher minimizes the distance between himself or herself by spending time in the field and focusing on participants' views (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). As noted in the description of data collection, I spent 18 days in the field directly collecting data from women. The process of research (methodological assumption) (Cresswell, 2013) entails inductive reasoning through gathering qualitative data (i.e., in-depth interviews) and using codes and themes in the analysis (Bernard, 2013). The axiological assumption, on the other hand, is documented in the description of the researcher about her existing values and biases (Cresswell, 2013). Following is a description of who I was as a researcher and the biases I had regarding empowerment.

I am an Iranian woman who lived in Tehran, the capital of Iran, my entire life prior to moving to Pennsylvania to complete my Ph.D. in Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management at Penn State. I earned my bachelor's and master's degree in Tehran. My life in Iran was pleasant. My family encouraged me to attend college and enhance my knowledge about the world through travel. After completing my bachelor's degree I started to teach Biology and Chemistry to students as a private instructor. Following my

master's degree I worked for a consulting firm and did research and planning for tourism destinations in areas close to Tehran. I also engaged in social activities, including independently traveling outside of the country. Based on the knowledge I gained, I became opposed to the prevailing culture and religious doctrine informing life for women in Iran. My opposition was linked primarily to the fact that (a) educated men and women continue to ascribe to traditional beliefs (e.g., women should do the household chores whether working outside the home or not, men should make all of the decisions for their family) about the role of women in Iran, and (b) women continue to underestimate themselves, in part because of the prevailing view of women from family members, society as a whole, and the law.

I acknowledge that I am troubled by many Iranian's attitude towards women as it is condescending and disempowering. It is also constraining because it has limited women's ability to make changes in their private and social lives. To suspend my own experience with an attitude towards empowerment, and in order to focus on Iranian women's experience (van Manen, 2015), I defined an empowered Iranian woman as a person who does not succumb to traditional, patriarchic, and religious beliefs and behaviors that seriously constrain her agency and attempts to gain knowledge about whatever is of interest to her, and ability to develop her skills, reach her goals, and have a better life.

I was an appropriate person to conduct this study for a number of reasons. I am an Iranian woman who was raised in Iran and who has had the opportunity to travel to Northern Iran and specifically the Ramsar region several times. As a result I have a solid understanding of the local culture. In addition, I had connections with local residents in

Ramsar, which proved quite helpful when recruiting respondents and gaining in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural context impacting female residents in the region. Further, because I speak the same language, Farsi, I was able to easily communicate with study participants.

### **Pilot Study**

Prior to the pilot study I made every attempt to minimize my bias by having my advisor review the interview guide, which included 16 questions (see Appendix A). I then conducted a pilot study in order to understand whether the questions were appropriate for and understood by Iranian women. I conducted personal interviews with four Iranian women living in Tehran who differed in age, educational background, and occupation. Two of the women were college educated, in their thirties, and working in a professional setting. The other two women were high school educated housewives in their fifties and sixties. One woman had previously lived in the Ramsar area.

I began the interview by asking each woman to “think about a powerful woman.” I then asked her (a) to define a powerful woman, (b) whether she perceives herself as a powerful woman, and (c) the reason for her perception. Results indicated that using the term “powerful” was problematic. To begin, the concept of power has a negative meaning. According to the respondents, those who have power try to impose their will on others and, while few in number, may include dictators. The women also differentiated between the terms, “power” and “ability.” They argued that each individual has ability, but one may use it and one may not. The two women who had college degrees also linked power to success. They suggested that women who use their ability to achieve their hopes



and dreams are successful. Those who are powerful and use their force to control others, however, are not successful because they use their power to oppress others.

Based on participants' feedback and their translation of the words power and ability in Farsi, the word, "powerful" was replaced by "empowered." In Farsi, an empowered person is one who has the ability to do something. Power means "Ghodrat" and ability means "Tavanaie." But when referring to empowerment individuals do not say "Ghorat mand sazi," instead they say, "Tavan mand sazi," which was the phrase used when collecting data in Ramsar. In addition, I added questions designed to explore the experience of women who work in tourism and positive and negative impacts of tourism on their life. Examples of these questions included: What positive changes, if any, have occurred in your life since you became involved in tourism? What negative changes, if any, have occurred in your life since you became involved in tourism? What do you think your family thinks about your working in tourism? I also added questions for community leaders. These questions focused on the impacts of tourism on the region and on women, as well as their perspective about women working in tourism. Examples of these questions included: Please tell me how your organization is connected to tourism, if at all? Are you involved in the process of planning and implementing plans for tourism development? Tell me what you think about involving women in tourism as hosts? Describe the barriers that exist for women who want to participate in tourism activities or feel empowered through tourism?

## Study Instrument

I was the study instrument. As a female Iranian researcher, I was able generate trust amongst study participants who were willing to talk to me for extended periods of time. I wore a Chador<sup>6</sup> when interviewing local authorities, which enhanced their trust of and respect towards me. However, coming from the capital, Tehran, I had a different accent, which unfortunately labeled me as different. I attempted to minimize my difference by not putting on makeup or jewelry and looking simple and approachable. Carrying an I-Phone and using a voice recorder was distracting for a couple of participants. When I realized that participants felt uncomfortable with my use of the voice recorder, I explained that I was the only person who would listen to the recording and, if necessary, would turn off the recorder whenever they did not want their responses recorded. No respondent asked me to turn off the voice recorder.

Following the pilot study I created two modified interview guides—one for women who do and do not work in tourism and one for community leaders. Both guides included a series of questions about empowerment and tourism's impact on women and their local community (see Appendix A for a full listing of the questions and Appendix B for the IRB approval form). All of the questions were designed to be broad, allowing for probing about the topics of interest in this study (Johnson , 2001).

The first interview guide included questions primarily about empowerment. To address research question 1 (i.e., What are women's perspectives on empowerment?), I began by asking women to “think about a woman you think has made progress in her life

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<sup>6</sup>A chador is a long black form of clothing that covers the full body from head to foot, excluding the face. A chador looks like a rounded pyramid, which is open along the front side.

and tell me why you think she is empowered.” My hope was that this question would help women recall real life examples that would enable them to talk about empowerment. A series of questions primarily drawn from previous research on empowerment followed. The first series, which focused on general issues of empowerment, included: “What do you think has helped her to become empowered”? “Do you feel you are empowered”? “Have you assisted someone to make a decision”? “Are you involved in decision-making within your household and/or at the work place”? “Do you think you have control over your life”? “Is there any difference between you and your colleagues or your husband in your home/workplace in terms of income, decision-making, wages, benefits and people’s interaction with you”? These questions were derived from previous research conducted by Kabeer (1999, 2011), Longwe (2002), Telfer and Sharpley (2008), and Tickamayer and Kusuiarji (2012). The second series of questions were related to impediments and supporters of empowerment. Drawn from Tosun’s (2008) work, they were: “Whether or not you feel empowered, have there been impediments to your achieving your hopes/dreams”? “Have you asked anyone else to help you to achieve your goals or overcome the problems”? “How do you think women are treated in your community”? The question, “If you were empowered what would you do with your life”? was designed based on my own experience. To address the role of tourism in empowerment, questions derived from Annes and Wright (2014) were asked (i.e., “What does your family think about you working in tourism”? and “What does the community (e.g., neighbors, friends) think about you working in tourism?”).

To address research question 2 (i.e., what are impacts of tourism on women's perception?), I used the questions asked to address research question 1 as well as—"If you are not employed in tourism, are you interested in working in tourism"—which I designed.

The second interview guide was designed to obtain specific information about tourism and women's empowerment through tourism from community leaders/key informants. The first series of questions focused on tourism development (i.e., "Please tell me how your organization is connected to tourism, if at all"? "Are you involved in the process of planning and implementation of plans for tourism development"? "Describe the barriers, if any, regarding tourist visitations, the development of tourism projects in the town, etc."?). They were followed by questions regarding women's involvement in tourism: "Tell me what you think about involving women in tourism as hosts"? "What do you expect from women in terms of participation in tourism"? "Describe the barriers that exist for women who want to participate in tourism activities or feel empowered through tourism"? "Describe the opportunities that exist for women who want to participate in tourism activities or feel empowered through tourism"? "How can these barriers be overcome, if at all"? and "What are the policies, if any, about involving women in tourism"?. The interview closed with specific questions about empowerment (i.e., "How would you define an empowered woman"? "Why do you think an empowered woman has these characteristics"? "Would you like seeing more women working in tourism"? "What should be done to make women in the region powerful"?). The questions included in the second interview guide were drawn from research conducted by Kabeer (1999, 2011), Tosun (2008), and Telfer and Sharpley (2008).

## **Study Sample**

Forty women and six community leaders (i.e., key informants) living in the Ramsar region of Northern Iran comprised the study sample. The 40 women included 20 who work in tourism and 20 who do not work in tourism. The decision to include women who work in tourism was based on evidence from the literature that economic involvement in tourism is a sign of empowerment that may impact women's evaluation of the influence of tourism on their life. The decision to include women who do not work in tourism, i.e. 9 women who consider themselves to be "homemakers" and 11 women who work outside the home, but not in tourism, were included to determine whether economic involvement in tourism affects women's perception of empowerment as well as their life. In addition, this group of women was divided into two segments in order to grasp the distinction, if any, between the perception of women about empowerment.

Six key informants, including one working in Ramsar's tourism organization, two working in Ramsar government, two village heads, and one working in the city council comprised the "community leader" sample. The decision to interview key informants was to gain insight to the perspective of local leaders about tourism, potential future tourism projects, the past and future of tourism in the region, its benefits and impacts on locals, and their perspective about involvement of women in tourism.

## **Data Collection**

Prior to this second phase of data collection I again attempted to minimize my bias and influence as the study instrument by modifying the interview guide based on the feedback of the pilot study sample. To enhance trust amongst local authorities I wore a Chador. All of the local authorities were religious people who put special value on

women who wear a chador while in public. For all of the interviews, I wore simple clothing and I did not put on makeup or jewelry. Data collection in Ramsar took place over 18 days. In-depth interviews and participant observation were employed to obtain a deeper understanding of participants, minimize judgment, generate new questions, and reveal hidden information such as unique aspects of the local culture and social interactions (Bernard, 2013; Dewalt & Dewalt, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). All interviews were face-to-face except for one, which was conducted over the phone. Before conducting each in-depth interview, I obtained oral consent from participants after introducing myself and the study goals, discussing the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews, and reminding them that they could leave the interview at any time should they become uncomfortable. To minimize bias I followed the interview guide closely. All of the interviews were tape-recorded. In some cases, a third party (e.g., participant's friend, a family member) attended the interviews.

Archival data including information about tourism projects, statistical documents, and local and national journals and books were collected in order to obtain insight to the history of tourism in the region and the level of involvement of women in tourism. I also maintained a daily log of my daily activities and observations, and kept field notes.

### **Sampling Method**

I used snowball sampling with a convenient start to identify a sample of women who work and a sample of women do not work in tourism. I used a convenience sampling approach to identify key informants. Snowball sampling, which involves asking informants to introduce others who have lived experiences with the phenomenon in question, is often used for hard to find populations (Bernard, 2013). In the context of

Ramsar, residents are not willing to talk with someone they do not know. Thus, I needed to be introduced by a person known by the potential informants. Interviews were all translated into English from Farsi and were transcribed by the researcher at the same time.

To begin the snowball sampling process, I spoke with two local individuals and tourism experts who were familiar with the prevailing culture and who knew people that might be good informants. I reached out to these people through referral before moving to the field; a friend of mine who was raised in Ramsar and lives in Tehran connected me with one, who introduced me to the other person. The criterion used to determine whether women worked in tourism was whether the business in which they worked was mainly initiated to provide service to tourists. In terms of the key informants (e.g., the head of Ramsar's tourism organization), they were identified by a member of the Ramsar Tourism Organization's staff who I was introduced to by one of my first connections. The staff member helped me to schedule interview times with key informants.

After conducting 10 interviews with women working in tourism and women working in other settings I reached saturation. I contacted my advisor to review what I was hearing and together we decided I had reached saturation. To ensure that the data would be trustworthy, however, I continued to interview women after I had reached saturation, doubling the size of each sub-sample (i.e., women working in tourism, women working in other settings).

## **Data Analysis**

Prior to data analysis, Cresswell (2013) suggests validating findings through member checking and peer review evaluation. I validated the findings by (a) listening to all of the interviews again and ensuring that they were conducted properly, (b) sending questions to study participants regarding comments they made during the interviews, and (c) sending study participants a document for review that highlighted the empowerment themes identified through data analysis. In addition, three randomly selected transcripts, both in Farsi and English, were sent to an Iranian who was fluent in English to review the translations. Minor modifications were made based on the various interpretations of slang.

Colaizzi's (1978) method was used to guide the analysis of the interview data. My advisor and I read the transcripts several times to obtain an overall feeling for the results. Then, each of us independently identified significant phrases or sentences that pertained to the lived experience of women's empowerment. Prior to assigning codes to the significant phrases or statements (i.e., data), my advisor and I met to review our assessments of each transcript. We jointly created a code list but then independently coded the meaningful data using a line-by-line coding strategy (Bernard, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). To ensure that we had inter-coder reliability (Cresswell, 2013), we met after reviewing three transcripts to compare codes. Then, inter-coder reliability was calculated. The resulting inter-coder reliability ranged from 90 to 100%. The formulated codes were then clustered into themes and integrated into an in-depth description of the lived experience of empowerment for women living in the Ramsar region of Northern Iran.

Methodological rigor was attained through verification and validation.

Verification involved literature searches, obtaining an appropriate sample, keeping field



notes, bracketing past experiences, and identifying negative cases (Meadows & Morse, 2001). Validation included using multiple methods of data collection (i.e., personal interviews, observation, secondary data collection); data coding and analysis by multiple researchers; and member checks by study participants. Member checking occurred through sending a summary of themes in Farsi via Telegram mobile application to three randomly selected participants from each group (i.e., women working in tourism, women working in another industry, homemakers). They were asked whether they agreed with the themes and, if not, to provide feedback. All nine of the participants agreed with the themes and only one provided additional comment. She suggested that I emphasize that “an empowered woman is the one who creates [something] out of nothing” and “she does not shy away from any hard job, even a low level job. It is important for her to create [a] job and provide jobs for others out of her job.”

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This chapter begins with a review of participants' perceptions of empowerment. The results are presented in terms how participants define an empowered woman and whether they consider themselves as an empowered woman. Following this discussion, impacts of working in tourism and factors affecting women's ability to achieve their goals are introduced. These results were included because context has been shown to affect perceptions of empowerment (Cornwall, 2003; Timothy, 2001). The chapter closes with a discussion of differences in perceptions of empowerment based on generation and employment.

#### **The Sample**

All of the study participants were women living in Ramsar Province. Most had lived in Ramsar their entire life; three women had lived in Ramsar Province five years or less. Half of the women who held a job in tourism (N=20) reported job titles ranging from housekeeper to owner of a successful travel agency. Nine women were homemakers and eleven held jobs outside the home in industries other than tourism (e.g., employee in a governmental organization, confectionary owner). All but nine of the women were married; one was divorced and the remaining eight were single. The age range was 24 to 60. The majority of women had university degrees and a few had high school diplomas or less. See Table 4-1 for more detail. The names in Table 4-1, which are used throughout Chapter 4, are pseudonyms.

**Table 4-1. Participant profile**

Name	Age	Marital Status	Education	Employment Status	Length of residence
<b>Women Working in Tourism</b>					
Ayda	54	Married	Third level of guidance school <sup>7</sup>	Self-employed: Grocery shop owner	54
Pooneh	36	Married	High school without diploma	Self-employed: Grocery shop owner	36
Kasraie	35	Married	Master in Chemical engineering	Self-employed: Owner of a booking website	35
Roshani	28	Single	Master in Tourism management	Museum employee: Museum guide	28
Rostami	34	Single	Bachelor	Museum employee: Museum guide	34
Peymani	48	Married	Diploma	Self-employed: Costume shop owner	48
Keyhani	50	Married	Certificate of third level of guidance school	Self-employed: Crochet weaver	50
Jasemi	30	Married	High school diploma	Costume shop employee: Tailor and salesperson	7
Rezaie	30	Single	Bachelor in accounting	Travel agent	30
Hoseini	33	Married	Master of Information Technology	Reservation employee in a hotel	22
Ebrahimi	56	Married	High school diploma	Self-employed: Owner of a hotel	5
Simaie	50	Married	Expelled from university due to her political activities, high school diploma in economics	Self-employed: Chef and instructor	50
Aghaie	35	Single	Master's degree in history	Tourism expert in Ramsar Tourism Organization	35
Deyhimi	33	Single	Bachelor in arts	Street handicraft vendor	33
Kahani	31	Married	Master in hotel management	Cashier and receptionist in a hotel	31
Sahraie	34	Married	Bachelor in English	Self-employed: Owner of a travel agency	34
Fazili	44	Married	High school diploma	Housekeeping employee in a hotel	44
Ghasemi	late 20s	Married	Master in Food Quality Control	Tourism expert in Ramsar Tourism Organization	20
Rastegari	33	Single	Bachelor in political sciences	Manager of a souvenir shop	5
Moini	34	Single	Master of business administration	Head of reception in a hotel	13

<sup>7</sup> Guidance school is the second educational level after primary school in the old Iranian education system. It included three years.

<b>Women Working in Other Industries</b>					
Jenabi	46	Married	High school without diploma	Self employed	30
Zahraie	43	Married	Master of education management	Advisor to Ramsar Governor on women's issues	43
Khosravi	33	Married	Bachelor in Environmental engineering	Self-employed: Owner of a chicken farm and fashion designer	22
Khalili	34	Married	Master's degree	Self-employed: Owner of a kindergarten	34
Tina	39	Divorced	Master student	Employee in a trading organization	50
Mirzaie	49	Married	High school diploma	Self-employed: Owner of a confectionary	20
Shamekhi	28	Single	Bachelor in psychology	Social worker in a hospital	5
Gholizadeh	27	Married	Master in Nutrition	Self-employed: Dietitian-nutritionist	3
Ghanbari	30	Married	Bachelor of social sciences	Office manager for town council	30
Saiedi	46	Married	Master of psychology	Self-employed: Founder of an NGO, family consultant-instructor	18
Pardisi	39	Married	Bachelor of English	Village head and homemaker	39
<b>Homemakers</b>					
Asemani	50	Married	High school diploma	Homemaker	18
Arabi	52	Married	Bachelor of Education	Homemaker-Retired teacher	42
Elhami	63	Married	High school without diploma	Homemaker	63
Haamedi	48	Married	Second grade in guidance school	Homemaker	28
Sarang	47	Married	High school diploma	Homemaker	47
Parizi	24	Married	High school diploma	Homemaker	5
Hamidi	52	Married	Guidance school certificate	Homemaker	52
Jasemi	60	Married	High school education without diploma	Homemaker	60
Hamzeie	39	Married	Bachelor in psychology	Homemaker	39

### **Who is an Empowered Woman?**

When women were asked to talk about the features of an empowered woman they introduced 10 themes (Figure 4-1). All (i.e., 100%) said an empowered woman is

“working [and] being busy,” “has unique behavioral characteristics,” and is a “game changer.” A vast majority (i.e., at least 85%) said an empowered woman holds a “position in society,” is “independent,” and involved with her “family.” A lesser percentage (i.e., 57% to 76%) indicated an empowered woman is able to interact, is educated and informed, and makes progress. The smallest percentage (i.e., around 30%) indicated that faith leads to empowerment. Following are reviews of each theme and, if applicable, sub-theme(s).

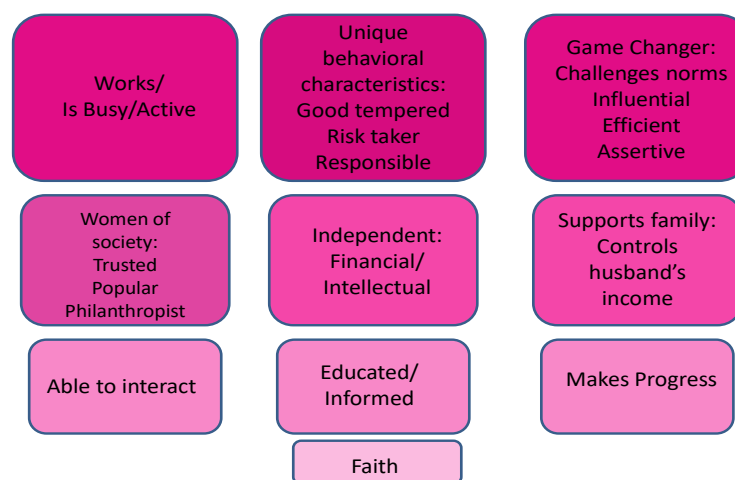


Figure 4-1: Uncovered themes related to who is an empowered woman?

#### **A working and/or busy woman.**

All (100%) of the respondents indicated that an empowered woman is one who works and/or stays busy doing paid or unpaid work. An empowered woman may, as Aghaie, an employee in Ramsar’s Tourism Organization, suggested, “...like to work in the society and apply [her] abilities outside of home while some like to be active at their

home.” She might also build upon “...whatever skill she has whether it is raising plants or handicrafts” (Fazili), even ownership or management of property. Asemani’s aunt took “ownership of the distribution of fertilizer in Mazandaran Province, owns a kiwi farm, [and] has a couple of buildings which are rented by City Bank and other [businesses].”

Being busy doing paid or unpaid work gave women the opportunity to obtain experience and be successful. Being busy also enabled empowered women to learn about themselves—“I like my work experience although I was annoyed [by] some of [my] colleagues... I learned a lot and I learned how not to be exploited” (Kahani)—and how to be independent—“...a man cannot meet the demands of his wife and kids [even] if he has the best job. Thus, a woman should certainly have a job” (Khosravi).

Working also resulted in a feeling of “usefulness”: “When I work and I am not futile I will definitely have [a] positive influence on other’s lives... At least I am useful for one person” (Moini). Usefulness extended for some to helping with the family’s expenses. According to Rezaie a travel agent,

In [our] society... if women do not work they can’t meet their demands unless the guy has the well-paid job and the woman sits at home and they can afford the life expenses. For most people, they should work together to afford their expenses. She said she was happy “[she did] not stay at home” because “at least [she] learned some skills, [she was] in the society, [she gained] some experiences, [and she] interact[ed] with other people.” Although “the salary is not good,” working provided her with multiple benefits because “money is not the whole thing.” Earning an income was also important to Haamedi and Sarang. Haamedi acknowledged, “[Having my own income] provoked me not to adjust and say give up. And my expectations rose” while Sarang said,

If you don't work, can anyone help you? Can you afford your expenses? In this society there is inflation. How can a woman not work? How can she not earn income? Empowered women can create income for themselves. When we have abilities to create income or not only income, but a job like running an educational institute or in a sport field, this woman is called empowered. Then she can have income as the result of the job for her subsistence and for her life like raising kids or interacting with her husband.

Elhami also believed that being employed outside the home (i.e., being an empowered woman) is a form of family support. She shared that her niece "is working at the hospital and her husband is an engineer... They were living abroad. He got a PhD. They did not have anything, they were zero. But her husband is [now] working as an engineer here and he is the head of [a company/organization]. I think it is the wife that influenced their progress."

Being able to earn an income, Haamedi argued, is important for women even when the work is difficult. "Our women work on rice farms, they go to the farm from morning to night... They work with men. Alongside of that they weave. That [allows] women to stand on their own feet..." Women who "sell vegetables in the local market. They suffer a lot by climbing far up the mountains to reach plants. Those who sell thyme... pick vegetables ... [and] make paste" are empowered because "they come to the local market to sell [their products] to [help] the house economy."

Working and contributing to the family's income was so important to Jasemi that she proudly talked about her experience planting seeds in tea farms. Although her job was hard and far from home, "[she] was not embarrassed." As a result of her work "[she]

was successful and [had] good kids.” Similarly, Shamekhi believed, “there is one goal but there are several ways to reach the goal. It is true that it is more difficult, but it is more valuable, it means you have not lost anything that you regret.” Her belief led her to make woven materials and sell them on the streets of Ramsar.

Being an entrepreneur was also a main feature of an empowered woman. As an empowered woman and a street vendor, Deyhimi noted, “I do not stay at home and say that oh, there is no job, who [will] employ us?” Maybe I thought that way before, but not now at all. Even if there is a governmental job, I will not take it even if they beg me to go.” Working and becoming independent was so important to her that she “broke with tradition. What [she] did maybe many others may not do because of losing honor or [because] nobody [would] propose marriage. These are little things but are very important things for a woman....” Being an entrepreneur allowed women to be their own boss. Jasemi, who worked as a saleswoman and a tailor in a traditional clothes store, indicated, “When you are your own boss it is better,” particularly because you don’t have to respond to anyone: “I do not respond to anyone and I am my own boss” (Simaie).

Jenabi, who survived her husband’s bankruptcy and supported her children’s education by cooking vegetables for local people in Ramsar, knew she had to “...strive [for herself. She] did not care if a man saw [her] chopping huge amounts of onions.” Khosravi, on the other hand, “started with raising chickens,” exemplifying Zahraie’s definition of an empowered woman: “[She] has to be great in everything like literacy, entrepreneurship, job creation. She should be able to lead the work that she has started and get it to the end.” In Khosravi’s case, her entrepreneurial venture began with a small chicken husbandry and a lot of patience: “You can’t pass a long, long way in one night.



You should move forward step by step... When you move forward step by step your self confidence is high and you have less stress.” As an entrepreneur she wanted to “make jobs for female household heads.” Today she employs three women and has, with help from the local union, started a food market in Sarlimak Village that has become famous.

Other women like Gholizadeh, a dietitian and lab expert in a confectionary, were also passionate about owning their own business and employing other women.

Gholizadeh believed that a woman becomes empowered when she starts from nothing, makes her business bigger, and provides other women with the ability to work. “When you create a job for someone who [then] has a better life...” Gholizadeh said, “it is very important.” Mirzaie agreed, even if people stole from her. Employing other women helped them have a source of income.

According to Khalili and Pardisi, empowered women take care of both their home and job, but Sahraie suggested empowered women do “not necessarily need to work outside of home.” Agreeing, Rezaie and Moini suggested female homemakers are empowered because they “raise good kids for the society” (Rezaie) and “do the household jobs” (Moini). “When she gets up in the morning she has a goal for herself. She grows vegetable in the garden so [she doesn’t have to] buy vegetables in the summer” (Moini). Continuing this line of thinking, Sahraie said a homemaker can contribute to the household’s economy through “taking care of bank loans” while Arabi indicated,

The first responsibility of a woman is to take care of [her] husband and children.

Woman’s Jihad is taking care of husband. A woman can create an industry in the home. It is said that the young don’t have jobs. But they can create jobs

themselves. Women can create jobs for themselves too like cooking, sewing, and making pastries.

### **A woman with unique behavioral characteristics.**

All of the respondents indicated that morality was a key behavioral characteristic of empowered women. However, they did not agree on the specific features that comprised morality. Several respondents agreed that empowered women are good-tempered. Having a good-temper affected empowered women's social interactions so much so that they were able to get their message across and encourage others to help them reach their goals. For instance, Saiedi related her success as the owner of a NGO to her good-temper because "being good-tempered makes you happy and it influences you and your audience." Keyhani believed that it was because of her morality; "if [she] tell[s] people that [she is] running a crocheting class in the mosque, 50 people might register." For other respondents, empowered women were kind. Their kindness was reflected in their generosity and being helpful to others. As Haamedi suggested, "when roses turn up she [my mom] says pick all of them and get them for yourself although she can make money out of them. She has kind heart." When describing the kindness exhibited by her mother, Tina said she takes care of her sick mother in-law with a kindness that "her daughters do not do..." She went on to suggest, "although it is said that when a woman works outside [of her home she] becomes harsh, becomes like a man, I want to say although she is powerful she has a kind heart."

Respondents also acknowledged empowered women positive. An empowered woman can meet the demands of her family through available resources (e.g., making

pizza for her children using a piece of bread at home) (Saiedi). Additionally, empowered women smile, which indicates that they are lovely (Shamekhi) and healthy (Saiedi).

Being brave enough to take risks was another behavioral characteristic of empowered women. For Sarang, Deyhimi, and Sahraie, taking risks was defined as facing challenges. Deyhimi criticized her sisters for being cowardly: "...[when] they want to buy rice my father should be present for them to buy a bag of rice. They don't make a risk. They don't go to the heart of danger that they once obtain experience so that they become able to purchase stuff alone." Commuting to Tehran's bazaar from Ramsar was considered to be risk-taking behavior by Sarang and Peymani while making and selling products on the street or in other new markets was risk-taking according to Deyhimi and Sahraie.

Empowered women also exhibited responsibility. They successfully completed jobs at home and at the workplace. For instance, Moini, the head of reception in a hotel, felt so much responsibility she used to carry heavy boxes of water through the hotel. She did this because "I don't say that I am woman and I shouldn't carry the boxes. ... When I see that it is necessary to carry the boxes I do that."

### **A game changer.**

This theme, which all (100%) of the respondents indicated represents an empowered woman, refers mainly to women's statements about being influential and efficient, having the ability to challenge norms, and being an initiator. Women also talked about empowered women being able to face challenging situations.

Influential women were considered able; they interact, talk and nurture others. As Kasraie suggested, empowered women are “able to do something new, opposite to the norms...” For example, Pardisi was successful in changing men’s perspective about a working woman in her village. As Khosravi reported, Pardisi was able to

walk around [the] street[s] from morning to night and visits stores... Men are like bees to her, she has the authority [and] the power that she believes she has ...Mrs. Pardisi even criticizes men, she walks in front of men with this authority. That is why she is powerful.

Empowered women can also, as Haamedi did, influence their husband’s mindset through managing family finances or by showing that “[they have]... abilities” (Khalili), and they can “do the job [they] want to do and [are] able to be beneficial at home...” (Sarang). Being able, for many, also included having the ability to nurture, interact, and talk to others.

Moini acknowledged empowered women not only work to benefit from it but also to be fruitful and “have [a] positive influence on other’s life.” Khalili, who called herself an empowered woman, influenced families’ perspective about involving fathers in child rearing. She also had an impact on local authorities in Ramsar: “If I ask [for] help from some organization for other people, they will do it. This feeling is very sweet.” Sarang acknowledged that an empowered woman is “influential in kids’ nurturing,” which likely draws from the “power of her words,” whereas Elhami felt taking care of the overall family was the key to her niece’s empowerment.

The power of words—i.e., talking—also helped to empower Roshani’s friend, a successful business woman, and Khalili who said she has been able to interact well with

local officials. Saiedi who comes from a family of empowered women also discussed the value of talking: “My mom’s family had empowered women. They were assertive and they talked in front of men, and they were decision makers in many cases, and in many cases men were influenced by the women’s decisions.” However, the power of words can also lead to suffering. After her failure to find a job related to her education, Rezaie noted that if she had been empowered, she would have made “families or friends who hurt [her], shut their mouths.”

Efficiency was also linked to being a “game changer.” As several women such as Hamidi and Sarang suggested, empowered women are able to do the job, while others (i.e., Parizi, Ayda, Rezaie, Jasemi, and Ghanbari) indicated, empowered women are able to achieve their goal. According to Hamidi, empowered women “are able to do the work... they are both mom and dad.” Sarang, on the other hand, said she is empowered because she is “...able to have a source of income along with her husband, ...help [her] husband with expenses by earning money, ... and influence [her] kids’ future, nurture, in their job, improvement, well-being, both for their own well-being and their kids’ well-being.”

Empowered women may even challenge the norms that are predefined for them in order to reach their goal. To challenge norms Kasraie said women must take two steps: “One is that you are taking the path you like. Second the mind for which everything was always predefined is acting in another way and that allows the person to be able to decide well when facing problems or other conditions.” An empowered woman is able to make her own decisions and do whatever she wants (Jasemi), particularly if she has financial independence, which enables her to implement her decisions “with more comfort”

(Hoseini). In contrast, women who did not achieve their goals did not feel empowered. Ayda felt she had “not reached anything special” and Rezaie simply didn’t achieve what she wanted because she “was not in it.” Having a goal and making an effort to obtain it is what Moini believes is essential for empowerment:

Empowered women... follow their goals... I see women whose life is summarized to marriage as if they don’t have any other plan after marriage or as if they don’t have any ability to continue. As soon as they get married their life remains in having kids and their life follows the routine life they had. Even their appearance becomes routine and they don’t have any goal. I’m a mother or a wife, it is ok, but an empowered woman makes balance between them.

Being an initiator or pioneer was also mentioned as central to being a “game changer.” Many women referenced being the first or the only female to do something. Khalili, Rostami, Kahani, and Sahraie were pioneers in their field. Khalili said she was “always” driven to be the first person to do something. Rostami courageously ran an unprecedented official cabinet making class for women. Sahraie was the first female employee to attend the board of managers meeting in the Ramsar Hotel after which she ran a successful travel agency. The significance of these and other women being a pioneer was that they had courage (Hoseini).

Being creative and being able to deal with challenging situations were also sub-themes of being a game changer. Empowered women “are creative...,” suggested Ghasemi. Their creativity is linked to their “beautiful mind” and ability to “create motivation for [themselves] and others” (Ebrahimi). They could generate income through creative ways such as cooking and baking (Arabi, Haamedi). While creativity may help

women deal with challenging situations, Rastegari said women must also be strong enough to interact with and manage other employees, even if they are men. Jasemi, Simaie and Deyhimi shared a similar perspective. Being able to fight for themselves in challenging situations and to adopt a path that was not consistent with predefined society norms led to their sense of empowerment. For Simaie commuting to Tehran to learn European cooking and running a start-up was challenging while for Deyhimi it was about being a street vender. Jasemi revived the local mosque when “nobody accepted [the responsibility of running] the mosque. They said it is not our job; people leave us alone in the middle of the way. But I said I go with the god’s hope.”

#### **A woman of society.**

Nine out of ten (i.e., 93%) empowered woman indicated that having a societal position represented empowerment. Women who were considered empowered by participants were trusted, philanthropic, and popular. In the case of Pooneh, Khosravi, and Rastegari, distributors, other colleagues and business people trusted them and responded by giving them products, loans, even invested in their businesses. For Jasemi, becoming economically independent resulted in her husband believing in her and trusting her in her interactions with men. Hamzeie, on the other hand, engendered trust within her friend network:

[I] can be tight lipped, ...people can trust [me] when they have a pain or a secret. They know if they say something to [me] tomorrow not all people [will] know. They can feel peace around [me]. It has been influential so far that people can count on me.

Connected to trust was the notion of dependability. Khalili recognized that she is perceived as dependable because, “they know that I will definitely do that well.”

Being a philanthropist also was reminiscent of empowerment. Empowered women were caring and active in volunteer work. They could, suggested Arabi, “sit there and do nothing, but they all feel responsibility.” Hamidi engaged in philanthropic activities because she had the money to do so. Elhami and Jasemi participated in mosque activities, which for them resulted in a great deal of satisfaction. Others focused on helping others. For example, Jenabi, who suffered a lot, said she “like[s] to help those who are like [her].” For Arabi, being a philanthropist is about “not forget[ting to] love people, ...help compatriots, neighbors, [and] friends as far as she can, and transfer whatever she knows...” Similarly, Hamzeie and Pardisi suggested it is about treating people the same; empowered women “look at people the same. [They don’t] differentiate between the poor and the rich” or between the “good or bad.”

Being perceived as popular led to a sense of empowerment. Being good and moral contributed to Keyhani’s and Elhami’s popularity. Others linked their popularity to religion (Jasemi), appearance and behavior at work (Khosravi and Janat), and a family member (Tina). Being popular also came through helping people and striving, as mentioned by Mirzaie and Simaie.

For other women popularity was manifested through praise received from local community members. For instance, Rastegari acknowledged, “Many believe that I am a boy because I am a disciplined person. Six persons work with me and I am their head.” Deyhimi received positive feedback on her physical attributes: “your arm is like a man... You earn money based on your work. Women can do many other [types of] work to earn money, but you sell your products to earn money based on your attempts.” Peymani’s had earned the title of “Mr. Monir” since she was able to easily interact with men and run her



own business. Notably, this positive perception was linked to masculinity and independence. Roshani's popularity came through "improv[ing] [herself]" through writing papers and "talk[ing] about them in scientific places where there are a lot of faculty members... defend[ing her] rationale and ... hav[ing] a challenging discussion." Through striving to become a self-employed woman, Peymani indicated that her "abilities have become prominent" for "the head of [the Tourism] bureau...the governor, the mayor."

**A woman of independence.**

Many (90%) women indicated independence is a main characteristic of an empowered woman. This theme refers to the ability of women to "handle a situation independently," both financially and intellectually.

*Financial independence.* When describing the role independence plays in empowerment, more than one-half of the respondents referred to not asking for help or being dependent and standing on their own two feet. Moini questioned why she should "be dependent on someone else." "A woman who can stand on her feet and not be dependent on her family... is an empowered woman" (Jasemi).

Ghasemi "did not want to get help from [her father or husband]" and Aghaie did not want to accept financial help from her family: "I have always worked from university library to private teaching to here. I never asked [my family] for help. That is empowerment." Deyhimi's sisters, who did "get their pocket money from their dad" were not considered independent or empowered. Not being dependent on others allowed Rastegari to "make plans for [her]self... not owe money to anybody..." It also led to

“high self-confidence,” which Rostami suggested, “makes you become more independent...”

Financial independence was also linked to women’s ability to “take stronger steps in their life” (Rostami) and to “help the household’s economy” (Moini). When discussing financial independence, Sarang said, “We should strive for what we want... and earn what we want.” Doing so “gives independence to the woman who is at home” (Khosravi). She will be able to have money when she needs it and the power to spend the money as she sees fit. As Arabi and Keyhani noted, “If she has financial independence it is good. This way she has the authority of her money” and “How much time should I wait for my husband to give me money and tell me spend it. I’d always like to spend myself and to own the money.” When Jasemi was not employed she “was dependent on [her] husband in terms of clothes, food, recreation, everything. [She] had to accept whatever he said.” After she obtained a job, she “was not dependent on him anymore.” For Haamedi, standing on her own two feet resulted in the feeling that “what I have is mine and is the result of my effort...”

Financially independent women also have the freedom and power to pursue their own dreams. Sarang said financial independence gave her the “power to play with money and invest.” Peymani, who had her own shop, “saw this empowerment in [her]self that I should have a name for myself rather than be under the name of someone else.” Investing in oneself, suggested Arabi, is “very good...” because “that is support for women after all.” Building on this broader social perspective, Ebrahimi indicated, the “social perspective should raise. We should strengthen it. ...Being independent it means [a woman] should be able to find a position in society for herself.” She should not “have

parasite life, and stick to a person and get nourished” (Saiedi) or “...stay and wait for the husband to see what he brings” (Sarang), which some women have chosen to do.

For a number of women, financial independence was not solely about taking control or developing oneself. It was also about contributing to the family (including supporting one’s husband): “Whatever we obtain, even if it might not be a lot, we cannot underestimate that because it can help the household” (Moini). It was also seen as leading to greater happiness,

When the woman likes her job, she works and earns money and she brings that money to her house. This money makes her happy in her life... she becomes able to send her kids to different classes. She becomes independent, [which] enables her to spend this money for her life and her children’s future becomes more clear. (Fazili)

Happiness, however, was difficult to attain, particularly for women who had not yet become financially independent. As Rezakahani recognized, “If you don’t have money, people look at you with a different perspective. ...As if the person that does not have money, that person is like a killer. The person does not have any position in society.” “If there is no money you cannot do anything special” (Roshani) or reach goals (Parizi).

For a few women, having financial independence was also about contributing to society. Khosravi used her finances to help other women: “I hired four workers instead of one. I did not need four workers, but I hired them.” Hamidi contributed her money to “philanthropic activities” because “when you have a good intention you can do many things with money.”

Despite the good that many women associated with financial independence, there were naysayers. According to Kahani, “An empowered woman does not necessarily need to be economically independent. If she is empowered she can take money from her husband’s hand...” Correspondingly, Khosravi felt her husband should handle finances: “[The] financial manager of my work is my husband. This way I feel more comfortable... This way his pride is protected.” She went on to state, “When I work I can say that I have capital, but the money is in the hand of my husband.” Pardisi felt similarly. When discussing how women should take advantage of their situation to earn money and be a good wife, she said, “...She can do her husband’s work so that he can do his other work... Both have income and [she] is working alongside her husband, meanwhile she has created a commitment.”

The distinction between benefitting oneself and the family through economic independence was not that clear for Ghasemi who stated,

Empowered women can create income for themselves. When [they] have abilities to create income or not only income but a job like running an educational institute or a sport field [these] woman [are] called empowered. ...[They] can have income as a result of the job for [their] subsistence and for [their] life like raising children or interacting with husband.

Sarang agreed: “[Women] can manage the money better and they can live better in terms of cloth, travel, food, the peace that runs in the house. They can send the children to good classes and they can invest money for the children’s future.”

***Intellectual independence.*** For some women financial independence did not completely capture what is an empowered woman: “The greatest value I see in a

woman... is being self-reliant, having independence, and that the person can decide for herself alone and can handle problems... That [she] can think..." (Hamzeie). Intellectual independence is not, unfortunately, something that automatically comes with financial independence. According to Hoseini,

Some [women] are financially independent, but they can't decide for themselves... they can't handle the situation. They are internally dependent on their father or their husband because they are men. They think because they are women they can't [make a decision]. [This is] because of the law that is in favor of men. Women have accepted that.

Having an independent intellect, which Hoseini believes comes from reading books, is important to a good marriage: "During life, when [a wife] expresses her opinions to her husband, he will realize that she can be superior to him and she can teach him..."

(Ebrahimi). Simaie saw intellectual independence as the ability to express ideas through various mediums: "When a chef writes poems, becomes a judge, or make a speech for 50 people here the difference between a normal citizen and a citizen that is independent."

#### **A woman with family support.**

This theme covers women's statements about their support of family. Women, married or single, supported their family, which included a husband, children, and parents. They did this through supporting their husbands through difficult times; managing the house (i.e., doing house chores, nurturing children, controlling family members' interactions, husband's income); contributing income to the household; and giving advice to family members.

Many empowered women supported their husbands by staying with them, despite difficult conditions. Jenabi initiated a home-based business as soon as her husband went bankrupt. While her family advised her to divorce him, she opted to stay because her husband suffered from depression. Pooneh experienced the same pressure from her family when her husband went to jail due to failure to repay loans. Jasemi's husband was a governmental employee, yet they had a hard time making ends meet. She helped her husband by working on other people's farms. According to Jasemi, "the backbone of the family is the woman. Turks say that without a man the family can survive but without a woman a family will collapse." She contributed to her family's survival through generating income for the household after her husband's bankruptcy. To her, "moral support is very (important)." Continuing to support the family allowed her husband to "gradually become alive" after experiencing depression that followed his bankruptcy.

Empowered women also managed their homes in various ways. For Simaie it took a long time to realize that she "[was] stronger than her husband." She used to "surrender everything to [her] husband," but it did not work because she was not able to live the way she wanted. However, as soon as she obtained a job she liked, she was able to influence her husband and take over leadership of the household. She managed to help her son recover from drug addiction and found a job for him and his wife. "Crisis management" and having a plan for life helped her to support her family and be successful.

Supporting their children was also considered a distinct feature of empowered women. Rastegari's mother supported her children by shielding them from problems in her marriage: "I never remember my parents fighting in front of us. [My mother] knew how to bring peace to the family. She used to separate the children from their dispute."

Others made sure their children grew up to be independent and respected. Simaie said her son was proud of her because she raised him to live independently in Tehran.

Ramazani's friend took care of her disabled daughter and brought her to every social event. Jenabi raised successful children by running a home-based business. Her income was used to send her children to university, meet their demands, and take care of her in laws. As a result she did not have to divorce her husband, although her parents had encouraged her to do so.

Other empowered woman took care of their family through conducting household chores (e.g., cooking). Despite having a job, when Pardisi goes home she "becomes a village woman...":

I clean and organize home; take care of home, kids; go out with him; [and] when a guest comes, everything is ready and organized. I do whatever I did before I get this position even better. So that he doesn't feel that this position will damage our life.

Sarang and Elhami indicated that empowered women prepare food for the family and clean their house.

Pooneh who believed she was an empowered woman controlled her family's income: "The income goes to my bank account. If it goes to his account, he is very, very lavish, but I say we have school children, we have to pay for utility for school for home, all of them are dependent on me." As a result, she called herself "the man of the house." Hamzeie and Keyhani also took control of the household budget. Keyhani sent her children to university through paying their tuition fee by crocheting. Alternatively,

Elhami did not consider women who were lavish and could not control their spending on unnecessary items empowered “because they don’t know how to spend money.”

Another strategy used by empowered women was providing advice to their husbands. Ebrahimi noted, “there is no time that [my husband] does something without having my advice.” She accompanied him everywhere, even to “brick furnaces.” Reflecting on her upbringing, Rastegari’s reminisced about her empowered mom who provided her dad with “constructive advice” because “If [her dad] did not consult with her [mom] or [he] ignored [her] mom’s opinion he would fail.”

#### **A woman who is able to interact.**

Respondents acknowledged that empowered women interact well with people, including men and family members, particularly husbands. Rastegari, for example, felt comfortable interacting with strangers at the handicraft shop she managed. Her strategy was to limit her interactions and be respectful of everyone, even impolite people. She believed this behavior “made [her] colleagues come back to [her]... to talk about [their] memories. [She] tried to stay in tourists’ minds and [to not] forget them, too.”

The ability to communicate well with a broad range of people and organizations was what Fazili believed “make[s] [women] become known” and makes her in particular “popular among guests.” Interacting with people, in general, is what makes women “learn some tricks or get to know a special social level or subcultures in the society by working outside the home” (Kahani). To be able to accomplish this, however, women must be assertive. For Pardisi being assertive meant being able to “talk strongly” through explaining laws whereas for Parizi it required “[being] able to talk well ...[so] she can move her work forward and she can have good social interactions.” For Saiedi, the owner



of a cultural NGO, being assertive involved “expressing [her] opposing idea as a human” and “[not] accepting everything right away.” The inability to express ideas results in “people decid[ing] something else for you” (Hamidi).

Respondents also believed that being sociable was characteristic of empowered women. As an empowered village head, Pardisi felt “good” when she “participat[ed] in... events run by the government or the seminars that are held in the village by the Health Center” because “this increases happiness and the hope for life.” She also was able “[to] see [her] old friends, exchange ideas, [and solve] some problems....” She believed that attending these events motivates women to become empowered. Khosravi also acknowledged that attending a social event motivated her to work hard as an entrepreneur and to be recognized as an empowered woman by the local government.

In terms of interacting with men, Peymani initiated interacted with them even when they were in groups. She noted, “as a woman when there are ten men outside I go and talk to them, say my ideas. As a woman I haven’t made myself weak.” For Simaie, interaction with men brought her credibility with her husband. She said,

When [men] see your husband and say, ‘what a strong wife you have or is she your wife? What a powerful woman she is. She is like a man’... your husband realizes that his woman does not talk or behave pointlessly and she knows how to act.

Interaction with men also enhanced her credibility with men in the community: “When I go to the union meeting and I talk in front of 25 men... [they] tell me that [I] talked like Zeinab<sup>8</sup>.” She felt strongly that “We should prove ourselves to men.”

Empowered women were not only able to interact with people from different cultures in the case of Moini and Tina’s mom, but they also knew “how to talk with [their] husband, children, [and] sister” (Asemani). Pardisi suggested that an empowered woman needed to maintain a good relationship with her husband’s family as well. When discussing communication with a husband, respondents provided a variety of examples. Zahraie, for instance, said she makes her husband aware of her schedule throughout the day: “If I want to go to my sister’s house, I call him and tell him that I am doing that. He says, ‘OK, why did you call me? Just go.’ I say, ‘no I wanted to inform you’.” Khosravi, on the other hand, cited a lifetime of communication with her husband. She indicated that she traveled a lot with her husband who had to live in different cities due to his job with the military. Supporting her husband this way was rewarding for her: “We talked a lot. It was his hope and our priority that whenever we stayed in a place I operationalize my thoughts. He tells everyone that my wife supported me for 10 years and now I want to support her.” Khalili also cited a great deal of support from her husband. She told her husband about her interactions with male strangers from different organizations; thus, he

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<sup>8</sup>Prophet Zeinab is the daughter of the fourth Imam in Shi’at Muslim. Shia’t Muslims respect her because of the memorable speech she gave when she, her family, and many Shiat’ Muslims were enslaved following a historical war in which her father, Imam Hosein, and his followers were killed by their opponent, Yazid the king. In her speech she criticized the then royal Islamic government system, Yazid the King, who led the war against Imam Hosein, and condemned them for being unfair to the poor and of not being a Muslim.

was not troubled by her behavior. He said, “I know you and that your everything is honest. I know nothing will happen from these interactions.”

According to Sarang, an empowered woman “can get along with her husband, ...does not allow the husband/wife conflict to disrupt children’s rearing, ...[and] can prevent children from suffering... using her skill and intelligence.” Empowered women also ask for support to overcome their problems. They take loans from the local government and public organizations to help them run their home-based or local business. They also ask for advice from unknown businessmen. In an effort to help her daughter, Haamedi asked businessmen in a Tehran bazaar for advice on how to run a shoe shop.

#### **A learned/educated woman.**

Learning and becoming educated through exposure to information played a key role in empowering women. Several women mentioned that they were able to become successful through involvement in community activities and/or reading books. Jasemi learned about handicrafts by stepping out of her home and being employed. Similarly, learning on the job helped Moini feel empowered. As these women suggested, not only did information contribute to an increase in self-confidence, it helped them to “get what they deserve” (Hamidi), legally. Being exposed to information broadened Gholizadeh’s and Pardisi’s horizons and opened their minds, while acquiring updated information about technology empowered Moini and Jasemi.

Learning from books provided Jenabi with information that helped her to raise her children and to give advice to her friends. For Simaie such learning was inspirational:

Studying makes people strong. I'm not talking about novels. For instance, I read Land's Pillars, which influenced me. It was a story of a nomad woman who had nothing and came to a city and she developed in the city and became like a princess. This book had a great influence on me.

When women were asked directly about the role of education and empowerment, their responses varied. For example, some women believed that education played a significant role in empowering women. Having an academic degree, Jasemi suggested, gives women the confidence to express their ideas and to be reliable: "I can say that the words that I am saying are not... [nonsensical] and [are] based on documents..." Academic knowledge is impactful because "those who are educated in the university got more scientific knowledge than those that did not enter university. Using that scientific knowledge can help [them to] make progress at work." Having an education can influence child rearing as well. As a woman whose father did not allow her to further her studies after high school, Elhami acknowledged, "If I had more education I would like to be an employee." While Shamekhi found that education resulted in connections, particularly with people who've been successful in life, Ghasemi believed that education provided women with more accessibility to information and hence more efficiency. Pardisi looked at education as "a means to reach a goal... otherwise, if you just study, what's the point?"

Other women felt education did not contribute to the empowerment of women. According to Deyhimi, being educated is not a big deal: "Education right now is part of a process that everyone should have... Now [a] bachelor's degree is worth a high school diploma." Education also does not guarantee creativity or success as an entrepreneur. As

Rastegari noted, “we have a person with a diploma here who has a creative mind while a person with bachelor has nothing to say. But my colleague who has a bachelor’s he wants to stay in his position and not advance.” Similarly, Ghasemi suggested, “There are some empowered women here who make handicrafts and they only have a diploma.” Education does not necessarily contribute to social interactions, either (Jasemi). Although an MBA degree helped Moini with her search for a job in a hotel, she said, “if I were younger. I would go working instead of studying to get more experience.”

#### **A woman who is making progress.**

Several participants indicated that empowered women have progressed in their private and social lives. When describing this progression they tended to compare a woman’s family life now with her situation in the past. For example, Pooneh said her “life became better, and had not collapsed [even though they] owed a lot of money, [and her] sir was in jail” because she had obtained a job and become an empowered woman. In the case of Simaie, reaching her ultimate goal, which was running her kitchen, was a turning point for her. She felt that she is now “making progress every day.” Like other women, working hard outside the home allowed Jasemi to contribute to her household’s income and to provide her family with a peaceful life.

A number of women said “having successful kids” (Zahraie) was an indicator of advancement and thus empowerment. Simaie helped her son who was a drug addict to rehabilitate and also provided a source of income for his family. Jenabi also helped her children through hard work. She described the hard times she had with her daughter:

I had a wicked daughter whose father picked on her for her hijab and he told her swear words. ...I tried to share her good things with her dad. I valued her and

[complimented her] in front of her. I told my daughter that you should tell me where you go and not have other people come to me saying that they saw you somewhere with a guy. So, I accompanied her and this is the second reason that I see myself as an empowered woman.

Women who had built a career from nothing were also considered to be making progress. Roshani used her sister as an example and explained how hard she had worked to establish a cabinet making certificate program for women, which is traditionally male-dominated. She also described how she had gained social credit by teaching at the university and providing rationale for her ideas. For Rastegari, making progress was to become patient and fix “each bad behavior that [she] saw [in herself and] ... to make things better by studying.” Obtaining a better position was also advancement/progress for Rastegari. She used to be a salesperson in a shop, but in time was given the responsibility of running a handicraft shop. She recognized, “[being given] responsibility is a way that makes you stronger... .”

#### **An additional example of empowerment.**

The previous themes were mentioned by the majority of women. The theme—A woman of faith—was introduced by a much smaller percentage (i.e., 30%), but was notable. Rastegari suggested an empowered woman “...has a strong faith that makes progress in her life.” Building on this notion, Zahraie said,

If [I] don't have trust in God, God will never help me. It is said you move and I give you. I don't think that if they don't have trust, they can be [an] entrepreneur and empowered. If they don't have it, they fail in the middle of the road

because...it makes them to have more perseverance. Our main perseverance is God. God is taking my hand...

Agreeing, Pardisi referred to God as “a superior force in life...because there is always a hope in your life and you think there is always a force that can help you and I never shy away.” For Khosravi, faith was linked to mental health. She talked about her depressed friend and related her depression to “not believe in God and praying.” As an empowered entrepreneur, she said that faith was a tool for her success:

Whenever I have [a] problem I go to a shrine and say prayers and I get energy.

Trusting God, praying, studying Quran I become well and I get the energy that I had in the morning. Praying, trusting God and studying Quran are all things that are influential for an economically active woman.

Having faith helped empowered women such as Arabi and Jasemi be optimistic and patient when facing hardship. Arabi believed, “Being pessimistic is very bad. I never become pessimistic... because I always had hopes to God. Being pessimistic is a big sin based on Quran verses.” Jasemi, on the other hand, felt believing in God helped her “to go and work [in people’s farms] so that [now she is] not desperate for the help of other people.” Spirituality gave her patience as well. She explained, “first you should get to know God and then become patient” in order to become successful. For Ghanbari, another woman who perceived herself to be empowered, faith “...leads to [a] sense of being supported. If you take faith away [you may reach] a dead end. ...If you have faith in God you will attempt again until you reach [a] result; these [processes I go through] are asking help from God.”

Having faith led Elhami, a Quran instructor in the local mosque, to have “good behavior” and subsequently become popular among people. She noted,

Our Emams had good behavior. When a human has good behavior, the person is popular, moving forward in life, is [her] husband’s darling. If she is a mom she behaves well with [her] kids so that they learn from her. That is good behavior.

Faith also prevented anti social behavior. When discussing her philanthropic activities Jasemi acknowledged, “My belief in God makes me not be an infidel and whatever I get from people I spend on the mosque.” Some participants like Jenabi, who had gone through a very hard time after her husband’s bankruptcy, saw her success in empowerment as God’s contribution and that “God raised [her] situation.” She referred to God as the “network” to success in her children’s life.

All of these women who saw having faith as integral to empowerment were homemakers. Further, with two exceptions, all of these women of faith considered themselves to be empowered women.

### **Am I Empowered?**

When women were asked, “Are you empowered,” they indicated, “yes, I am empowered,” “yes, I am somewhat empowered,” “no, I am not empowered” or, in some cases, were uncomfortable answering the question (Figure Table 4-2).



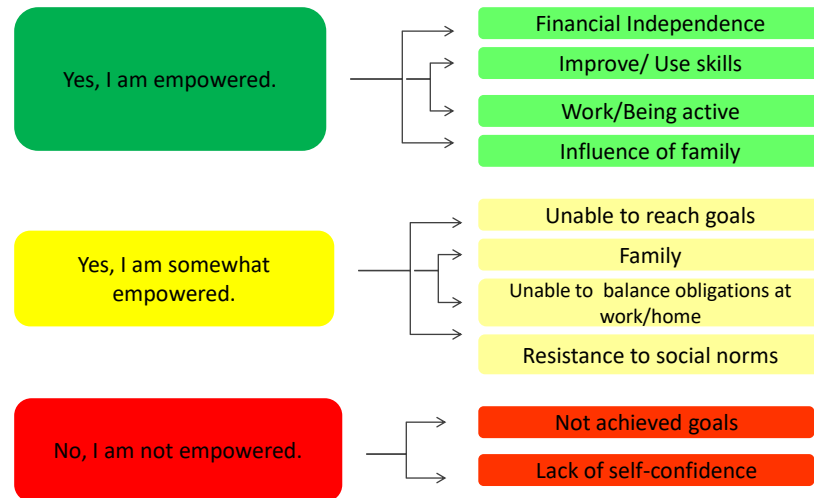


Figure 4-2: Themes related to are you empowered?

Those who said, “yes, I am empowered,” suggested that their feeling of empowerment was primarily due to their independence, ability to actively build upon their skills and attain their goals, and the influence of family. Those who felt somewhat empowered cited goal attainment and family, addressed issues with work and balancing obligations at work and at home, and cited social norms. Women who said, “no,” they are not empowered, had not achieved their goals, which in some cases led to a lack of self-confidence and an unsatisfactory life, or the feeling that they had not achieved as much as other women. The women who were uncomfortable answering the question, “Are you empowered?”, felt empowerment should be externally assigned. Asemani, for example, indicated her empowered role models were her mom and her aunt who were

economically and mentally independent women. She was trying to learn from them as well as her “grand mom.” She felt uncomfortable stating whether or not she was empowered. Instead, “other people should say that I am or I am not.” Similarly, Keyhani, an entrepreneur who is known for her good morals, economic contributions to her family, and friendships with everyone in the area, responded, “I am. But people shouldn’t make compliment of themselves.” Although she recognized that she was empowered, she was not willing to call herself an empowered woman. The same type of response was uttered by Arabi, an educated, retired, socially active, and religious woman. She said, “other women should say that.”

### **Empowered women.**

Financial independence was a primary source of empowerment for many of the women who worked outside the home. For Deyhimi, being financially independent allowed her to “buy many things for [herself] that others, like [her] sisters, may not be able to buy.” It also represented a freedom to do what one wants, as Rastegari suggested: “I am not dependent in terms of money. I have done whatever I wanted to do...” Financial independence, however, was not easily obtained. Rostami “suffered a lot of hardship” in her efforts to establish a course for women that would result in a cabinet-making certificate. She feared what would happen if “...[she] move[d] forward and f[e]ll down...” While the course materialized and she was able to pursue her dream of making closets and cabinets, she did so by building on her connections (i.e., friends and family members in construction). Fazili, who used to raise plants and shifted to a housekeeping position at a local hotel, also struggled to be financially independent, but this was due to the cost of infertility treatments and a husband who left her after she had a child. She

“raised [her] kid, and... [provided] facilities for [her] home and [her] daughter.” She said, “I am not dependent to anyone and I don’t like someone to help me.” This pride in being financially independent carried over to pride in self, as Moini suggested: “When I compare myself with others, I have done a great job for myself.”

When discussing what led to her being an empowered woman, Peymani said, “Water which moves never becomes stinky. Empowerment is like this water. When you are active, in whatever amounts you attempt, you earn the same amount of output.” Being active for her was sewing, something she had engaged in since she was a child. Roshani, on the other hand, “started working without any practical experience. [She] taught a couple of classes... [and] was humiliated many times.” Then, she “strengthened [her] computer and English language skills,” both of which allowed her to pursue her goal of owning her own business. This commitment to bettering oneself was referred to by Moini as seriousness: “In our culture if women are not serious they will not be taken seriously.” Seriousness in her case helped her to increase her self-confidence, commit to her job, and to obtain respect from other employees, including her boss: “...My opinion was used... my boss asked about my opinion and used that... this helped me a lot.”

Aghaie’s and Jasemi’s empowerment was derived from having a position in a governmental organization, tourism organization, and/or participating in community-based activities respectively. Aghaie became empowered through working “...and [applying her] abilities outside of home...” She works “...outside of home so that other people can benefit from [her] abilities...” Jasemi cited her work with the mosque, which she said has resulted in her becoming a member of the board of trustees, successful, and famous among women.

Whether they felt empowered through working outside the home or through actively engaging in community-based activities, many women suggested that they could not have become empowered without the support of family and friends. Asemani learned a lot from other women: “My grand mom was a female manager. I learned a lot from her... I have tried to learn from my mom and aunt and grand mom.” Similarly, Saiedi said she “had an empowered mom. [Her] mom’s family had empowered women. They were assertive and they talked in front of men and they were decision makers in many cases, and in many cases, men were influenced by the women’s decisions.” Support also came from men. Ebrahimi’s husband did not like her to sit at home and wanted her to accompany him:

There are men who say, ‘don’t come with me,’ but my husband was opposed to the trend and said you come with me. Sometimes I may say... I even went to a brick furnace with him. He asked me to go with him. My husband is empowered too. We can do everything.

#### **Somewhat empowered women.**

Most of the women who mentioned they were somewhat empowered focused on what they lacked, especially their inability to attain their goals. For example, Jasemi felt she was somewhat empowered because she had not attained her goal of having a university education. Hoseini, acknowledged her inability to obtain a job related to her field of study. After pursuing graduate school she was hired by a hotel, but was not allowed to work in a senior level position related to IT due to the hotel’s policy of not hiring women in senior levels. “I strived for six years to reach something and at the end I did not obtain that,” she said. Women who were looking for additional job experience or

to be more successful in their own business also perceived themselves to be somewhat empowered. For Kahani, saying they were somewhat empowered captured their desire “...to be more...” Kahani had a job related to her education, but she wanted more work experience and more professional education. Her knowledge of the English language and, in particular her appearance, helped her to obtain her job. Appearance is “really influential in my field, people’s face should be in the form that does not have negative energy or others do not become upset when they look at the receptionist for instance.”

Women also suggested that they were only somewhat empowered due to their inability to balance obligations at work and at home. Marriage had stopped Jasemi from attending university since “[she] either [could] do house chores or study. [She] could not do both.” Although her family encouraged her to continue studying after she had her child, she believed that “it was mostly [her] fault because [she] got married early, as if [she] couldn’t find [a] husband.” She acknowledged, however, that previously “she did not have a desire because [she] did not even think about that [before];” now she does think about her future. Unfortunately, not all women’s families were encouraging and supportive like Jasemi’s family. Mirzaie was unable to expand her business or accept senior positions in the local government or in companies due to her husband’s influence. As an exemplary female entrepreneur, Mirzaie felt that “if [she] was alone and [she] had a better financial situation, [she] could become more successful...” Her husband was concerned about her “endanger[ing] [her] health...” if she expanded her business or accepted other positions as well as her ability to “[take] care of her life<sup>9</sup>.” For Sahraie and

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<sup>9</sup>Life here refers to family. When “life” is brought up in discussions related to a married woman in Iran, the term refers to the woman’s family, including her husband and children.

Zahraie, however, their inability to balance their responsibilities at home and at work was the reason they felt somewhat empowered. Zahraie's realization that "[her] husband [was] not involved in house chores" led her to feeling that "[she] ha[s] weakness in this issue." Her father's authority in her childhood home had influenced her perception of her role in her own home, i.e. that she provided everything for her husband without asking him for help. She indicated that she wanted "to raise her [husband's] position at home" by asking their children to obtain their father's opinion/permission for every single thing they wanted to do.

Socio-cultural norms also contributed to the feeling of being somewhat empowered. Hoseini's resistance to cultural norms about marriage and "whatever sounded non reasonable [for her]" was empowering. So, too, was her commitment to learning English and earning the required certificates to get prepared for immigration. Due to the decreased value of Iranian currency, however, she was unable to leave Iran to pursue an advanced degree, making her feel somewhat empowered.

#### **Women who perceived they were not empowered.**

It was impossible for Ayda to perceive of herself as empowered because she had not achieved her goals. She had "attempted [to achieve her goals] within her abilities" as a farmer and then as a shop keeper with her husband, but she was not successful in part because "too much work does not allow [her] mind to see what [she] should do." Due to her age and pride Ayda did not believe she would ever be empowered. The inability to achieve work-related goals was also a concern for Rezaie who was unable to find a job she liked related to her field of study. She suggested that she would have been empowered "if [she had] wanted something and [she had] obtained that, [and she had]

become successful in that...” Similarly, Parizi could not attain her goal of going to law school due to her “weak will.”

For some women the inability to attain their goals led to a loss of self-confidence or an unsatisfying life. Hamidi, for example, noted that her shyness and inability to interact with people was due to a lack of self-confidence. Hamidi did not feel empowered because her upbringing and shyness did not lead to self-confidence. For Kasraie, being unable to attain her goals resulted in dissatisfaction with life. Tina did not consider herself empowered when compared to her mother. Her mother was a well off, socially active woman who took care of her family and her extended family. She held multiple jobs at the same time, which Tina was not able to do.

### **The Impact of Working in Tourism**

Because context affects perception (Cornwall, 2003; Timothy, 2001) I asked women who worked in tourism the following questions, all of which were associated with their job and achieving personal goals:

- What are the costs of your job (in tourism)?
- What are the benefits of your job (in tourism)?
- What helped you to reach your goals?
- Have you faced barriers to reaching your goals? How did you overcome them?

The themes uncovered through analysis of their answers are reflected in Figure 4-3.

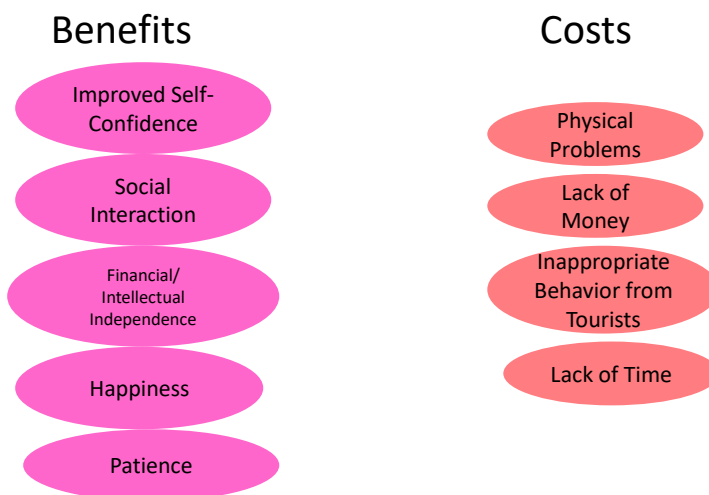


Figure 4-3: Benefits and costs of working in tourism

### **The benefits of a job in tourism.**

To explore the contribution of tourism to women's lives, they were asked to discuss any benefits their job in tourism has for them. Many participants acknowledged that their job in tourism has resulted in greater self-confidence, social interaction, financial and mental independence, patience, and happiness.

***Self-confidence.*** When women who worked in tourism were asked about the benefits of their job, one-half of them acknowledged that their job had increased their self-confidence. They suggested interacting with people from different backgrounds had contributed to their self-confidence. For Kasraie it was hard “to interact with new people or be in new places” before she began working in a hotel. After working in a popular



hotel in Ramsar she found she was better able to communicate “with people with whom [she] had a social gap” and to learn about luxurious hotel services. Roshani, a museum guide and tourism instructor at a university, also found that increased skills and financial independence resulted in more self-confidence: “When personal abilities increase that makes you become more independent and your self-confidence raises and you think the works that you had thought you were not able to do, you say they are piece of cake.” In addition, while using other’s investment to start a business is scary, “when things belong to you, you move forward with more self-confidence.” Rastegari also recognized the importance of financial independence (i.e., selling products in the bazaar by themselves). When asked about her self-confidence, Simaie noted that she used to be “strong” even prior to starting her kitchen. When she launched her business “everything was vague because I did not know in which way I had stepped.” yet she trusted herself and thought “this way will end with the result that I want.” Now she “feel[s] stronger and [when she] sees weak women gossiping, their gossip cannot affect [her].”

***Social interaction.*** Several women mentioned that their job in tourism provided them with the opportunity to interact with people. For instance, Roshani met faculty members from different disciplines while she was a guide in Ramsar’s museum. Meeting and servicing 3,000 people was “enjoyable” as well as “challenging”:

You stand there and give information to people, who do not have any information, and you help them and guide them and you have to have this capacity to put yourself within the capacities of that person. If that person is lower, then you pull yourself down and if the person is higher than you, you pull yourself up.

Interacting with people from different cultures while in the museum helped Roshani to have a “realistic view” about people and their various cultural backgrounds.

Some women said they had become more sociable and less shy as a result of their job in tourism. Jasemi, a homemaker prior to becoming a shopkeeper in a handicraft shop, said she used to be shy. However, when she started working in a handicraft shop and interacting with people from different parts of Iran she became more sociable. She learned to communicate her ideas specifically when she had to interact with men. Similarly, Deyhimi managed to overcome her shyness through initiating conversations with strangers and making friends with them while working as a street vendor. For her, interacting with people was a way to reach her goals:

Having friends is very good because [a] friend teaches you something that makes you reach your goal. Through that person, I can become familiar with another person. You can talk many things to a friend while you may not be able to tell that things to your parents. You can choose your friends but your parents or siblings are chosen for you. I want to choose more friends who are richer, happier, and more successful.

Her job allowed her to interact and not feel “alone.” She felt “happy” because she had “so many friends.” For Ebrahimi, running a hotel was a way to escape from “isolation” after retirement. Tourism jobs also linked women to influential people in the community.

Working as a travel agent, Rezaie was able to interact easily with the CEOs of companies and bureaus and subsequently their employees: “If I stayed at home, neither Friday Imam knew me, nor the dean of Register Office or the dean of [the] Tax Bureau.”

***Financial and mental independence.*** Many women indicated that their job in tourism provided financial benefits. Pooneh, for instance, stated, “It was great in terms of financial issues, I paid rent and we did not have money to pay it [before]. We did not have any savings. But with this job I could save money for our life in order to have a good life.” Similarly, Keyhani was able to buy land and build a house. She was able to help her son by buying a car for him, which allowed him to work as a taxi driver. Others who had their own businesses, like Kasraie who ran a hotel booking website, earned more income than their husbands.

Financial benefits were also linked to a sense of mental independence. The financial benefits of Jasemi’s job led to independence in making decisions, not “obedience to [her husband] anymore.” She emphasized,

When I want to buy something, I buy it without having his acceptance. Now, I decide for myself in many things. For instance, we arranged a trip to Ardebil (in North-Western Iran) with Mrs. Peymani. He did not say anything and said ‘whatever you like,’ because I don’t ask for money, and he knows me and he knows her.

Mental independence was reflected in making decisions more comfortably and preventing women from “overlook[ing] many thing for very little things” (Hoseini). For example, Aghaie’s financial independence allowed her to not only personally benefit, but also to help her family financially.

***Patience.*** Greater patience was also highlighted as a benefit of having a job in tourism. Women linked their patience to the nature of their job, which requires interaction with people from various backgrounds. Although Rostami had bad

experiences with visitors who did not listen to her, she indicated, "... the tolerance threshold will increase so that you can interact with people for a long time." Hoseini said she had learned how to adjust to and become more patient with various situations: "... here guests have [an] up-down perspective and [the fact] that you can control yourself in these situations is very important and changing the atmosphere is very important." Working as a handicraft street vendor, Deyhimi had to become more patient because doing so "influenced other parts of [her] life. When something happen[ed] [she was] patient about that and [she was] was not hasty."

*Happiness.* Feeling happy was also one of the benefits of having a job in tourism. Several women felt happy due to their enhanced economic and social positions. For example, having been able to obtain the position she sought, Simaie, a popular chef and entrepreneur, felt "really happy" about and "enjoy[ed]" her job in tourism. Since joining Mrs. Peymani's costume-making shop Jasemi had become much "happier" so much so that her husband had asked her "what are you guys doing over there that you have become so happy?" She indicated that if she had stayed at home she would have remained a depressed person. She linked her happiness to her boss's "positive vibe" that "improved morale." She was happy that she had the chance to come out of "a gloomy home." Peymani felt happy as well when she saw people wearing her costumes. Deyhimi had become "very happy" because she was "in touch with people" as a street vendor. She was encouraged by and became happier due to her interactions and that gave her hope. She was now able to save money; something she could not have imagined before when she was at home not working. Roshani felt happy because she believed she "[had] not wasted [her] time and [she did] something positive."

**The costs of working in tourism.**

Responses were scattered. A handful of women noted time, physical problems, and lack of money as costs of their job in tourism. Others, including Roshani, mentioned, “there is no specific problem,” despite the fact that they had listed costs associated with their job.

*Time.* Women who identified time as a cost referred to it as lack of time to take care of their families and to take care of themselves. According to Kasraie, working in a hotel was time intensive due to work shifts (2pm to 12 am). This led, as Kahani emphasized, to a “lack of time... with [her] husband and his family. You always lack time.” Even working in a souvenir shop required long working hours. For Rastegari, “The hard job conditions are the long working hours, no holidays. Women like to do shopping and I don’t have time to do it.” It did not matter whether they were self-employed or not, they had to spend a lot of time working in order to earn a good income. Deyhimi, a handicraft street vendor, said lack of time resulted in her not being able to travel.

*Physical problems.* Women also said their job resulted in physical problems. Pooneh, a shop owner, indicated she had “no problem” with her job yet acknowledged, “it just hurts you physically. Sometimes you have to carry heavy stuff.” Roshani, a museum guide, acknowledged that the tiredness came from interaction with tourists, which “takes a lot of energy.” Working a lot as a costume maker, Peymani experienced “backaches, [and] neck [and] eye [pain], all [as] negative changes” because “when the person works a lot [she] becomes tired.”

***Lack of money.*** More than half of the respondents indicated financial problems as a negative aspect of their job. For Rezaie, working in a hotel travel agency did not provide as high an income as she expected. Similarly, Moini acknowledged, “salaries are low here.” Her salary—“less than 1,000,000 Toman”—fell below the poverty line in Iran in 2016 (i.e., 2,300,000 Toman). Other participants complained about their lack of money to invest in or run their business. Lack of money prevented Peymani from extending her workshop in order to avoid wasting fabrics; Rahmari from operationalizing her idea to revitalize coastal areas in Ramsar; and Keyhani, a handicraft maker, from having a permanent shop to sell her products.

***Interaction with tourists.*** Interacting with tourists was also perceived to be a cost of women’s job in tourism. Whether they worked in a museum, hosted hundreds of people, or worked in a hotel, they found interacting with tourists to be a “hard job.” Rostami went on to say that interaction is hard because of tourists’ inappropriate behavior (e.g., not adhering to social mores) or their “nasty and disgusting behavior,” which she did not think they would exhibit given their wealth. Moini, who worked in a prestigious hotel, acknowledged, “I got tired of interacting with people who do not understand and those [who have top social positions while they do not show decent behavior].” Overall, these women’s interactions with tourists resulted in a negative image of people from other cultures.

### **What Helped You to Reach Your Goals?**

When women were asked what helped them to reach their goals, they cited external resources such as organizations and friends, personal abilities and family

members, their personal abilities. In terms of external resources, several respondents had reached out to different organizations (e.g., local government agencies, tourism organizations, and Imam Khomeini Relief Committee) for help. Jenabi received a loan from Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation to run her small home-based business, which helped her to deal with her husband's bankruptcy. Aghaie wrote a letter to the Governor directly asking him to endorse her for a job in Ramsar's Tourism Organization. And others were encouraged by their friends to stay focused and strive for what they wanted. Deyhimi's friend, for example, suggested a way for her business to sell more products. She even promoted Deyhimi's products on the street.

Respondents also acknowledged that their personal abilities had helped them or other empowered women to reach their goals. The ability to openly express her beliefs and ideas helped Kasraie to ignore social pressure to wear a hejab and chador and instead wear outfits that she liked, even when she had to meet with representatives of governmental organizations, a context in which wearing a chador is preferred. Hoseini, on the other hand, suggested simply "Proving yourself" was what women needed to do to succeed in Iran's male-dominated society. Similarly, determination was what helped Deyhimi, a street vendor, be able to buy a house for herself. Changing behavior turned out to Hamzeie's way to overcome significant challenges, too. Hamzeie, whose husband had not allowed her to pursue an education, decided to "domesticate him with [her] behavior" by consulting him, minimizing the degree to which she was "opinionated," and "behave[ing] with him well." When she became "strong" she also asserted herself and started attending the university.

Families, including parents and husbands, were also a main source of assistance for respondents. Parents played a key role in supporting women financially and non-financially. Rostami's parents "were there," "understood her," and supported her when she came back home after her cabinet making workshops for women failed to progress. Pooneh's parents gave her money to get her husband released from prison. Kasraie's father gave her his house to use for her start-up without charging her.

Family culture was cited as a form of non-financial support that enabled women to pursue their goals. In Jasemi's case, she was better able than her husband to make decisions because her "...father [was] retired military and always asked his kids comments about anything and he [was] very open minded." Hoseini mentioned the impact of one's upbringing. She felt, "If she had an independent mother she would definitely become more independent." She went on to say, "For instance, many families study books. It is very influential. Or, when in the home, [the] father gives the daughter freedom and opportunities. [He] lets the daughter implement her decisions," that helps women become empowered.

Several women acknowledged that their husband played a key role in their achieving their goals. Asemani explained that she only asked her husband for help "...because I just count on him. Based on what he has told me, I have seen that the best person that can help me is him. I can count on him from every aspect. He is a logical person, patient, he is self-reliant and he always show the best way." Pooneh's husband gave his shop to her to run a supermarket and she felt empowered.



### **Barriers to Reaching Their Goals**

Women (those who were employed in tourism, outside tourism, and homemakers) were asked whether they had faced any barriers/problems in reaching their goals. Many women faced barriers/problems such as financial issues, social mores, and their marriage/husband. Nearly a quarter of participants acknowledged legal issues/ regulations and their personality acted as barriers for them to reach what they wanted.

For several participants lack of money was a big barrier to reaching their goals. Simaie, a well-known kitchen owner, stated that if she had more money she would be able to run a restaurant or a hotel. Pooneh's hardship was her bankrupt husband who was imprisoned, leaving the family with no money. Her life was so hard that she had decided to sell her kidney despite the fact that her other kidney was not healthy. She managed to overcome these problems through making bread and running a food store catering to tourists. Although she was paying three banks for land she had purchased, she had reached her dream of having a small farm to grow food on it. Similarly, Jenabi's husband had faced bankruptcy and lost his properties. Thus, she obtained a loan from Emam Khomeini Relief Committee and started a job at home, which allowed her family to survive. Her efforts resulted in "insurance and... in two years... retirement salary and [the knowledge that they] are not dependent on our kids."

For some women, not having money meant they could not implement their dreams. Roshani believed she always had "creative ideas but in many times because of lack of enough money I was not able to do some of them." If Ayda had received a loan from a bank, she would have been able to extend her merchandise at the store. Others overcame the financial problems they had after marriage by uniting with their husbands

and independently deciding, for example, to sell jewelry (Elhami) or become more frugal (Haamedi). For Hamzeie becoming financially independent would free her from the hardship she had been suffering in her marriage. She firmly believed,

Women encounter so many challenges in our society and if they are not financially independent this challenge will become multiple. For instance, I know many women that are putting up with their lives because they are not financially independent. ... If they leave their husband, what they can do? And if they have financial independence they can decide [what is] right [for them and] not continue the life they don't like.

Social mores cultivated a prohibitive culture for some women in Ramsar. Several participants believed that women were the target of people's biases and gossip, both of which affected their ability to become or do what they really wanted. Hoseini, who had run a high-tech company with her girlfriend for two years, had to leave her job because "[she] got bored with proving [herself] and fighting. [A customer] saw we did the job but [she] preferred to have a man do the job for the customer." She continued: "Even [when] we work with places that are mostly women... even [they] do not accept us." Although she had did her best to continue her job as a computer hardware expert, she said, "it is hard to change society's perspective. You might be able to change a person's perspective." Aghaie, who worked in a governmental organization, had to control her behavior. She "did not laugh at the work place" and was very serious so that nobody could take advantage of her. She indicated that some women are concerned that people talk behind their back when they go in to the field with male colleagues or attend meetings with them. However, she chose to ignore these issues and went to the field and

attended the meetings with men. Similarly, Sarang reflected on when she started as a store owner 20 years ago. She said there was a stigma against “elegant” women who worked in a male dominated environment. She did not open up about the stigma but she stated that individuals were negative about elegant women. Such negativity led her believe that a woman should have the power to work and “to put up with people's looks.” Unfortunately, the negative atmosphere continues. Mirzaie has been the target of social bias, too. As the owner of a big shop in Ramsar, she said that some officials do not believe in her requests because they think she is a “liar,” i.e. they do not believe that she will implement what she has proposed. Tina, a government employee, explained how social pressure has limited her. She mentioned,

From a hejab aspect, women cannot wear or do whatever they like in small towns. Many people wear chador at the workplace but wear mini jupe at weddings, [which] is very bad, it is being two-faced. I am in this outfit wherever I go, I don't like it, but because I am an advisor in a bureau I am their representative. If I go out in public in another outfit they say isn't she Mrs. Tina? ... It decreases many of my activities.”

Families also imposed limits on women. For instance, Moini, who was a front office supervisor, explained that her parents “did not allow [her] to go to Tehran to work. They put pressure on me and said you are a girl you should be at home..., but my brother did not have this problem.” Rezaie's parents also did not allow her to go out of town to find a better job. She was forced to stay in Ramsar and put up with rare job positions. Elhami's and Ayda's dad did not allow them to obtain an education. However, Ayda had studied “stealthily” and managed to get through the eighth grade.

Marriage turned out to be a barrier for some women. For instance, Hamzeie's husband did not allow her to continue her education at the university until her child went to the third grade. He did this despite her passion for academic education and her efforts to obtain his permission. Over time negotiation with her husband worked and she was able to register at the university in her forties. The influence of marriage for Parizi and Khosravi was different. While their husbands were supportive, their husbands held jobs that did not allow for migration to another town (Parizi) or the ability to obtain permanent residency in a different city (Khosravi), which ultimately negated their ability to pursue a college degree. For Simaie and Mirzaie, their husband's personality turned out to be a barrier. When Simaie and her husband needed a loan to expand their business her husband would not use his social position to get the loan because "he was a government employee and is very conservative and scared and tries not to owe anybody." Mirzaie's husband did not allow her to continue her education or to accept high managerial positions that were offered to her. As she said,

If my husband allowed, I [would have] owned two or three factories. I feel [I have] this power. If he [had] allowed [me] to continue [my] education, get those positions, go to Tehran to work in the ministry, I would have two or three big factories.

Husbands as well as parents created barriers or problems for women. Jenabi and Hamzeie had to take care of their in-laws for several years and thus were not able to spend their time doing what they wanted. "...I was very young, naïve, kind-hearted. I thought I should listen to whatever my mother and father in law said" (Jenabi).

Regulations and legal issues also created barriers for women's empowerment.

Hoseini, who had a master's degree in information technology, experienced discrimination from a government led hotel that refused to employ females in high managerial positions. Instead, the hotel employed a male student as the Hotel's IT expert. While she felt, "a woman should fight for basics," she acknowledged that women are so used to these laws (e.g., losing custody of their children after divorce or their husband's death; needing their husband's permission to leave the country) that they ignore or do not know what their rights are.

Women's personality was a barrier for their achievements as well. Rezaie talked about her lack of confidence at work. She said, "I think I know nothing." She compared herself to her male boss and believed that the customer understood what he said faster than when she said the same thing. Others feared they would not succeed, Rastegari feared loneliness and dealt with it by studying and recognizing that "anything can happen." Elhami used to believe she had no value. However, she gradually overcame this belief when her husband gave her money to spend. His trust in her led to her controlling the family budget. Tina's was afraid to leave Ramsar for another city, thinking that she would not find a job elsewhere. Parizi attributed her inability to achieve a university degree to her lack of will. She regretted getting married before continuing her education at a university.

### **Differences in Perceptions**

When uncovering the themes associated with empowerment I questioned whether differences existed based on various factors. The two factors that arose were generation

and type of employment. Thus, I further reviewed women's responses while accounting for both factors.

### **Differences in perceptions based on generation.**

Study participants ranged in age from 24 to 63. Nearly one-half were in their thirties; the other half ranged in age from forty to sixty. Only five participants were in their twenties. The women who ranged in age from 40 to 60 were children and adolescents prior to the Islamic Revolution, which happened in 1979. Women in their 20s and 30s were born after the Islamic Revolution.

Iran's Islamic Revolution (January 1978 to February 1979) was chosen as a historic period that likely would differentiate between generations for a number of reasons. While Islamic regulations and laws continue to prevail, women did experience socio-cultural, economic, and political changes after the Revolution. For example, prior to the Revolution religious families prohibited their daughters from attending school because they were not segregated (Bahramitash, 2013). At the university level, women were not allowed to pursue degrees in mine engineering or nursing if they were not single or widowed. After the Revolution women's school attendance increased due to their families' desire to send them to segregated schools (Bahramitash, 2013). The number of women attending universities also increased. In fact, the number of women who completed the university entrance exam (nearly 640,000) was more than that of males' (nearly 440,000) in 2013 (Mehrnews, 2013). Unfortunately, women continued to be discriminated against at the university level; they were prohibited from entering disciplines such as veterinary science and legal studies after the Revolution (Moghadam, 2003).

In addition, the Iran-Iraq war (September 22, 1980 to August 20, 1988) and associated U.S. imposed sanctions, which took place after the Islamic Revolution, significantly affected economic conditions within Iran (Bahramitash, 2013). For instance, the textile manufacturing industry witnessed a significant decline in jobs for women, i.e. from 606,646 in 1976 to 337,436 in 1986 (Karimi cited in Bahramitash, 2013). Overall, the number of employed women decreased from 12.9% in 1976 to 8.2% in 1986. By 2006 (considered to be the post-war and reformation era) the percentage of employed women (i.e., 12.5%) was nearly equal to that reported in 1976.

The Revolution also impacted Iranian's exposure to the world outside their country. Increased usage of the Internet and social media impacted women's awareness of legal (e.g., discriminatory laws) (Shirazi, 2012); economic; and political inequalities in Iran. Many women started "micro-entrepreneurial" activities (Bahramitash, 2013). Women from high income households started interior design businesses, provided rentals for wedding ceremonies, or ran women-only art exhibitions (Bahramitash, 2013). Women from middle-income families began dress making businesses, home day care, and tutoring activities. Women from low-income families became salespersons (Bahramitash & Kazemipour, 2011). Despite this new entrepreneurial spirit, other women continued to follow Islamic law and focus primarily on their domestic responsibilities (i.e., nurturing their children and caring for their husband).

To explore differences in perceptions of empowerment, I compared responses of the pre-Revolution group (i.e., women who ranged in age from 40 to 60 and were children and adolescents prior to the Islamic Revolution, N=17) and the post-Revolution group (i.e., women in their 30s and 20s who were born after the Islamic Revolution,

N=23). Most of women who were in the pre-Revolution group indicated that they were empowered (i.e., empowered and somewhat empowered); the same was true for the post-Revolution group. Further comparison revealed that women's perceptions of empowerment were the same no matter when they were raised in Iran. Regardless of their generation (i.e., pre- or post-revolution), women linked empowerment to having a job; being financially or intellectually independent; having the ability to interact with people; family support, including doing house chores; nurturing children; economically contributing to the household; and taking control of the household. Empowered women were perceived as being influential, initiators, creative, able to challenge norms, and making progress.

#### **Differences in perceptions based on type of employment.**

Of the 40 women sampled in this study, 20 were employed in the tourism industry, 11 were employed in other industries, and 9 (i.e., homemakers) were not employed outside the home. All of the women, regardless of type of employment, linked women's empowerment to being employed or active, being a game changer, and having good behavioral characteristics. They also felt that empowered women had financial and intellectual independence; were interactive and had good communication skills; supported their family (e.g., through child rearing, spending their income at house, financially and intellectually supporting their husband); and benefited from attaining socially positive positions (e.g., social credit, philanthropic activities).

Women employed in tourism acknowledged that their empowerment emanated in part from the social interaction they had with people from other cultures as well as an increase in self-confidence. They also linked their empowerment to financial and



intellectual independence, which they had because of their job in tourism. Women working in other industries, as well as homemakers, were more likely to suggest that knowledge, learning and education were integral to becoming an empowered woman. The notable difference between homemakers and women employed outside the home was their perception that faith is linked to empowerment. Many homemakers related their empowerment or women's empowerment to God's intentions and their Muslim faith.

While employment appeared to have some effect on women's perception of empowerment, it became apparent that addressing differences based on employment alone was too simplistic. Thus, following is a review of the results based on both employment and women's perceptions of their own level of empowerment.

#### **Differences in perception based on type of employment and level of empowerment.**

Nearly all of the women employed in tourism and other industries indicated that they were either strongly or somewhat empowered (Table 4-2). However, only four of the nine homemakers felt they were either strongly or somewhat empowered (Table 4-2). One of the women working in the tourism industry and two of the homemakers were unwilling to say whether or not they were empowered (Table 4- 2) because they felt that decision should be left to others.

Women who perceived they were empowered or somewhat empowered (from here on referred to as "empowered") and working outside the home in tourism or other industries held similar perceptions of empowerment. Both groups agreed that empowered women support their families, are financially and intellectually independent, and interact with people. Some differences, however, were uncovered.

Table 4-2: Employment status and empowerment

Employment status (N)	Empowered	Somewhat	Not empowered	Unwilling to express
Employed in tourism (20)	11	5	3	1
Employed in other industries (11)	6	4	1	0
Homemaker (9)	3	1	3	2

### **Empowered women employed in tourism.**

In terms of women who worked in the tourism industry and perceived they were empowered, all agreed that empowered women are those who work or are active and are game changers. Nearly all believed that empowered women have social standing, and are trustworthy, risk takers, brave, humble, and responsible. Most acknowledged that an empowered woman is one who supports her family through child rearing, housekeeping, and caring for her husband. For nearly one-half of this group, however, an empowered woman also has the ability to interact with people, is a good communicator, and has acquired knowledge about her work/life.

Two women in this group, however, presented differently from the others. The first was Deyhimi who sold her handicrafts on the streets of Ramsar. She was young, educated, optimistic, and independent. Before interviewing her, I expected to hear that she was not empowered because of the negative attitude that exists towards female street vendors. However, she believed she was strongly empowered due to her ability to challenge social norms, overcome financial barriers, and to use her skills and become independent. The second was Hoseini who talked a lot about legal barriers for women. Her focus on discrimination against women in law, regulations, and social norms was

partly due to her knowledge about different topics (e.g., knowing about successful women in the world, being well-versed about Iranian literature) and her father who had an open mind about women. Her focus on discrimination was also linked to the challenges she faced when denied a senior position in a local hotel simply because she is a woman. She was the only participant who indicated that she has been denied a position due to a discriminatory regulation.

### **Empowered women employed in other industries.**

Women who perceived they were empowered and worked in other industries linked empowerment to being happy, perseverance, and being creative. The notable difference between this group and the tourism group was that many believed empowered women have faith. They believed that faith is a source of support for them when facing hardship. Saying prayers and believing that somebody has their back made them more patient and hopeful.

It should be noted that this group included a strongly empowered woman who was a popular village head. Although she was introduced to me as a homemaker, she did not believe she was a homemaker. When describing a day in her life, she stated that she did all household chores, worked on the family farm, and completed duties associated with her position in the village. Unlike other homemakers, she considered herself a working woman because homemaking is a job.

### **Women who are not empowered.**

Women who perceived they were not empowered also revealed subtle differences based on type of employment. For example, women employed in the tourism industry linked their lack of empowerment to their inability to reach desired goals such as higher

education, finding a job related to their field of study, having the appropriate skills for their job, and obtaining decent job experience. Most of the women employed in the tourism industry were in their jobs because they had been unable to find a job related to their field of study. The one woman working in another industry linked her lack of empowerment to her inability to be a multi-tasker (e.g., pursuing an education, taking care of her family, working at the same time, socializing). Homemakers suggested their lack of communication skills and inability to attaining their goals (e.g., academic education) contributed to their perception.

### **Key informants' view about women and tourism development in Ramsar**

I interviewed six officials who had low and high level managerial positions in Ramsar province. They were mainly asked about tourism development and the status of women in tourism development, and their perspective about empowered women. Following is a discussion regarding officials' views concerning women and tourism development.

Many people, including Ramsar officials acknowledged, "Ramsar women are hard-workers and empowered." Similar to local women's perspective, they also believed that empowered women were "creative," "assertive," "create opportunities for themselves," and "take advantage of what they have." When they were asked about the involvement of women in tourism, all expressed interest in involving women in tourism and emphasized the need to do so. However, at the time of the interview there was no specific policy regarding women's involvement in tourism.

With respect to officials in Ramsar's Tourism Organization, their main concern was development and improvement of the tourism infrastructure (e.g., accommodation and entertainment services). The only strategy they had implemented for women was to provide women with temporary bazaars through which they can sell their handicrafts or home-made food. This strategy contributes to the organization's priority of "involving women in making handicrafts."

While officials generally acknowledged that women should be provided managerial positions, in reality women were not allowed to occupy senior managerial positions. The policy of government hotels was to employ only men for high managerial positions. Outside of the tourism context, the governor was told not to recruit women for senior positions two years ago. That policy led to the cancellation of a contract, which would have led to the installation of a female governor for a small city<sup>10</sup>.

Prevailing norms, which have their roots in traditional patriarchal culture, also affected officials' decision-making regarding women. A tourism official expressed his concern about recruiting a female vice president. He questioned "what people may think if I go to the field with a female colleague"? Another official mentioned that he had asked his wife (who used to be his colleague) to stay at home and not work at the organization. Some officials said that women do not believe in themselves and they are not confident enough to take on responsibilities. As an example, a female employee showed up in the middle of an interview with an official. The official asked her whether she was able to

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<sup>10</sup>Assigning women to high ranked job positions is happening in Iran now. In the current government several women have been assigned to vice president positions in ministries. In addition, one woman recently accepted a position as governor in a small city in South-eastern Iran.

take a higher job position in the organization. It took two seconds for her to respond. He interpreted her pause as not accepting herself and not being confident enough to take higher responsibilities. Another female official agreed that women were at fault when they do not receive higher job positions. She mentioned that she turned down a senior job offer to spend more time with her family.

In addition, officials said they do not have regular meetings with women. The only way they have become aware of local women's problems or concerns is when they visit specific tourism sites. An exception was noted with the Governor who holds monthly meetings with representatives of female employees working for local governmental organizations. The aim of these meetings is to set up events to encourage the appreciation of women on specific days or holidays (e.g., Women's Day).

"Women in Ramsar do well in service centers, agencies, accommodations specifically in handicrafts but they do not have a prominent role," acknowledged an official. Although officials expressed that women have the capacity to take higher managerial positions and they should take higher responsibilities, most of them expected women to run the business themselves. One official said, "women should help [tourism] by offering good plans like nature tourism, like ecolodges, medical tourism. We focus more on local souvenirs." In summary, and judging by officials' point of view, their priority for women's development was to facilitate ways (i.e., fairs) for them to find a market for their handmade products.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to uncover women's perspective on empowerment and the degree to which tourism development may have affected their perspective. Following is a synopsis of the results as well as a discussion of the theoretical and practical merits of my findings. After discussing the limitations of my study, I close the chapter with a discussion of potential lines of future research as well as practical implications for tourism practitioners.

#### **Iranian Women and Empowerment**

One-half of the women believed they were empowered. The other women, who identified as "somewhat empowered" or "not empowered," believed they had several characteristics of an empowered woman (e.g., being employed), but did not consider themselves to be completely empowered because of their inability to reach their goals, find a job, balance their work life and home life, and/or limited work experience. Regardless of the category (i.e., empowered, somewhat empowered, not empowered) in to which they self-categorized, all were able to discuss their perceptions of empowerment.

#### **Perceptions of empowerment**

Employing an emic approach, I uncovered 10 themes pertaining to women's perspective on empowerment in Northern Iran, Ramsar Province. Nearly all women

believed that an empowered woman keeps herself busy and productive through formal employment, such as working for a governmental organization or running a company, and/or participating in informal activities such as managing her household and raising vegetables for family use or for sale. In addition, empowered women were described as good-tempered, risk taking, brave, and responsible. The economic benefits of empowerment identified in this study are similar to those presented by Mayoux (1998), Kabeer (1999), and Mello and Schmnik (2017), but challenge results reported by Gnale, Afriyir, and Segbefia (2015) who found that employment and having income do not necessarily empower women living in a dominant patriarchic culture; an environment in which men take their income, leaving them with no control over their money. The difference between Gnale et al.'s findings and those presented in this study may be due to the fact that many of the employed women had control over their income; they used their income to maintain their household, in some cases bringing it back from bankruptcy. Further, their husbands supported their employment and resultant leadership role.

Participants acknowledged that empowered women are game changers who: influence others by talking to and nurturing them, are creative, and efficiently do their job and achieve their goals. Empowered women challenge norms (e.g., select their preferred hejab, don't submit to traditional expectations for marriage, are mobile) and, as such, are considered "women of society." They are trusted and involved in philanthropic activities, resulting in popularity in their community. These results support research previously conducted by Ganle et al. (2015), Kabeer (2011), Kim et al. (2007), and Swain and Wallentin (2009), but they also introduce an opposing finding, i.e. women accept the prevailing norm that household work should be done by women. Although these women



perceived they were empowered, they also considered their husband to be the head of the house and thus should be served. Hence, in the patriarchic society of Iran, the notion of empowerment includes women who have accepted traditional gendered roles inherited from previous generations.

Empowered women were also thought to be financially (through having income) and intellectually (e.g., through being self-reliant and able to make decisions and express ideas) independent. As suggested by Kabeer (1999) and Rowlands (1997), women's ability to make decisions for themselves and for their families (i.e., intellectual independency) is a sign of empowerment.

The majority of study participants believed that an empowered woman takes care of her family (e.g., supports her husband, children, and family members) while simultaneously managing her house (e.g., cleaning, cooking, managing household finance). Empowered women also were considered sociable and able to interact with people from different cultures. Various scholars argue that women's unpaid work at home should be seen as a way to support the family yet also stress that empowerment comes from economic independency (Ferguson, 2011; Tucker & Boonabana, 2012). The results in this study supported their contention. Women in Iran highly value family, so much so that they see their contribution to family as a form of empowerment; they also perceive women who are able to balance household and outside household activities as empowered.

Being educated and/or informed about societal issues, were also characteristic of empowered women, and reported earlier by Longwe (2002) and Goldman and Little (2015). So, too, was "making progress." Women who make progress nurture successful

children and contribute financially and non-financially to the survival of their family.

These results align with several studies whose results suggest empowerment to be a process (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Kabeer, 1999, 2011; Zimmerman, 1998). Many of the women who had successfully managed the process that leads to empowerment had received assistance from organizations, friends, and family members. They also had the personality (e.g., ability to openly express their beliefs) necessary to achieve their goals. Women who had not progressed or achieved their goals indicated that this was due to: lack of money, marriage (e.g., prohibitive husband or in-laws), regulations and laws, social norms, and lack of self-confidence.

The results of this study also indicated that empowered women have faith. Respondents indicated that believing in God helps them when they need help and to have hope. A woman of faith was believed to behave well with others, a notion communicated by religious leaders such as holy Emams. To my knowledge, the notion of faith has not been linked to women's empowerment. Due to the influence of the Islamic religion in Iran, God and Islamic beliefs play a key role in women's lives. Believing in God and other holy persons (i.e., Shiat Emams) leads to a sense of optimism and hope, resulting in a feeling of empowerment.

### **Perceptions of empowerment and type of employment**

When women's perception of empowerment was compared between those who worked in tourism, those who had a job in other industries, and those who were homemakers, the main differences between those who worked in tourism and those who worked in other areas were that those who worked in tourism indicated interaction with others and self-confidence were contributors to empowerment while those who worked in

other areas cited increasing knowledge and education as the sources of their empowerment. Faith was the main source of empowerment for homemakers. Other studies conducted globally in a tourism context have revealed that self-confidence (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016; Tran & Walter, 2014) and the ability to interact with others (Annes & Wright, 2014) are sources of empowerment, lending support to the findings reported here.

### **Contributions to the Literature**

The results of this study have contributed to the literature in a number of ways, first by addressing women's own interpretation of empowerment. I used an inductive approach, which is unlike most studies conducted with women in Iran, which have focused on women's empowerment from a deductive and quantitative approach. Using this approach I was able to uncover 10 themes associated with empowerment, 2 of which (i.e., behavioral characteristics and faith) are new to the literature but may be context dependent.

#### **New themes of empowerment**

Women in this study linked unique behavioral characteristics (e.g., good tempered, bravery, and responsibility) and faith to empowerment. In terms of unique behavioral characteristics, being good-tempered enabled women to interact with people around them, resulting in friendships. These interactions also helped them to advance their social networks, receive help from others, and be helpful to others. Bravery helped them to reach their goals, which is a significant feature of empowerment. Taking responsibility, the third behavioral characteristic, was exemplified through women doing

whatever was necessary to get something done. Through taking responsibility they presented their skills, capacities, independency, and leadership. Responsible women also supported their family (e.g., husband and children) and were more likely to attain their goals.

With regard to faith, women of faith were optimistic about their future and did not shy away from challenges. They believed that there is an out source (i.e., God), which is always ready to help them. Their belief empowered them such that they felt confident, found strategies to deal with their problems, and reached their goals. Interestingly, the women in this study who linked faith to empowerment were homemakers. Considering the fact that homemakers are dependent on another source (e.g., husband) for survival, believing in God may be a strategy they use to adapt to the family's power dynamic, and develop self-confidence and, ostensibly, empowerment.

Using an inductive approach with women in Iran, a country dominated by the Muslim culture, likely led to the emergence of the new themes of empowerment. I suspect that with additional research these findings might be uncovered in other areas of Iran, except the Northern coast, where women have been exposed to tourists for a long time and where it is common for women to work outside of the house, be publically present, and to interact with strangers. More research is required, however, if scholars want to continue to refine empowerment frameworks that will guide future research and enable generalization of findings to women globally.

The data also revealed that working in tourism resulted in more patience and happiness, two themes that I've not found in the tourism literature. Women developed patience after interacting with tourists who came from various cultures, exhibited

different behaviors and ways of communicating. Through their interactions they also learned how to respond to the problems they encountered by developing appropriate strategies whose implementation took time and energy. The end result was greater patience and, ultimately, the ability to convert their ideas to practice and achieve their goals, which led to happiness. Patience and happiness are also qualities that are required in the process of empowerment. Over time women learned that being patient is rewarding and leads to happiness, which is manifested in achieving what they want, i.e. a form of empowerment.

### **What about political empowerment?**

Missing from the results of other studies of empowerment conducted in Iran is the notion of political empowerment (Amiri, 2011; Rahmani, ZandRazavi, Rabani, & Adibi, 2008). In Iran, political empowerment is linked to the ability of women to become involved in political activism, such as challenging discrimination against women (Shakuri, RafatJah, & Jafari, 2008) or it can include a woman holding a senior-level position with a governmental agency, on a village or city council (Abbasniya & Mosaffa, 2012). In these studies political empowerment was not considered to be the ability to make decisions at a household level, yet Amiri (2011) did link women's intellectual independency to empowerment. Although decision-making was not extensively mentioned in this study as a form of empowerment or recognized as a political dimension of empowerment, the ability to make decisions was hidden in their reference to financial and intellectual independency, holding a position in the society, and being a game changer. This finding highlights the importance of using research methods that allow women to draw from their own lived experience when asked to think about the meaning

of empowerment. It also reinforces the necessity of probing. Depending on the study context, women may not feel comfortable mentioning a factor (e.g., ability to make decision) that influences empowerment. Instead it may be uncovered through follow-up questions presented by the investigator as well as through the hidden layers of participants' experience (i.e., finding signs of decision making through other sub themes). Considering this finding, I acknowledge the time limits I encountered with my interviews. If I had been able to engage in a more in-depth, longitudinal study with women, the notion of political empowerment might have been uncovered.

### **The link between tourism and empowerment**

In Ramsar Province, where tourism is a leading industry, women working in tourism perceived empowerment to be linked to sociability, self-confidence and creativity, which has been noted previously by various authors (Amiri, 2011; Heydari et al., 2014; Imeni-Gheshlagh et al., 2012; Vosughi & Ghasemi, 2014). For example, women who worked in tourism suggested that a dimension of their empowerment—self-confidence—was derived in part from their interactions with tourists from different cultures. This finding reflects the social nature of tourism that encourages interactions between hosts and guests, an opportunity that does not always arise in other industries or careers. Through interactions with tourists women became aware of other cultures and perspectives.

Women's social interactions with tourists may also be linked to their self-confidence. Ramsar is a small city far from the capital with little connection to industries other than tourism and agriculture. Although Ramsar is located on the way to Rasht, one of the most populated cities in Northern Iran, it does not benefit from trade and the

presence of giant industries. While agriculture was once the city's primary industry, it is increasingly dependent on tourism related activities and tourists who mostly come during spring and summer. The fact that the city has a long history of agriculture is important as men and women have participated in agricultural activities together. For many years women were seen wearing loose hejabs while working in rice farms, sometimes with a child fastened on their back, or selling their vegetables in the bazaars. This image likely led to the perspective that women are free to be out in society and to interact with strangers.

Based on the results of this study, this is not true because gendered norms continue to limit women's mobility (e.g. not being able to be out at a certain time of night or not being able to talk to men without a specific reason), yet may not be as constraining in Ramsar as they are in other areas of Iran due to agriculture. Perhaps the combination of agriculture, which requires the efforts of both men and women, and the introduction of tourism, which has generated awareness of other peoples and cultures, has led to greater empowerment for women working in the tourism industry. Specifically, women's interaction with strangers has raised their level of self-confidence in that they have realized they can handle interactions with people other than their acquaintances. Further, familiarity with other perspectives has raised their critical thinking skills such that they are able to compare themselves (e.g., their appearance, ideas) with tourists who visit their city. Overall, through socialization with tourists, women have become informed, exchanged ideas, and developed critical thinking skills, all of which have led to their ability to make decisions and become more self-confident, qualities through which empowerment manifests.

Further, participants linked empowerment to creativity. Creative women were identified as those who could find a solution for the challenges they faced. They were able to influence their surroundings by taking control of household decisions, which affected community members' perspective of them. The tourism industry provided women with opportunities to step forward and put their ideas into practice, such as starting a kitchen or a hotel. In addition, being able to show their talents through the implementation of their business ideas, resulted in a better social position. Overall, it was through the influence that women had on people around them that they became game changers/empowered.

While working in tourism did contribute to the empowerment of women, it also presented problems. Tosun (2000) found that lack of financial resources for investment in and development of tourism products and services was a problem for women. A similar finding was uncovered in this study; women were not able to implement their ideas or reach their goals due to a lack of money. This was problematic as attending university and running business are some of the ways through which women have been able to enhance their skills and strategically deal with their problems; tasks inherent in the empowerment process. In addition, while not specifically linked to empowerment, women working in the tourism industry held negative perceptions of non-local cultures due to uncomfortable interactions they had with tourists. This finding adds to the research focused on the perceptions of tourists about hosts and tourists' change of image about hosts (Milman, Reichel, & Pizam, 1990; Pizam, Jafari, & Milman, 1991).



### **Norms and empowerment**

Social norms include what people believe to be typical or appropriate action in their group (Mackie, Moneti, Shakya, & Denny, 2015) while personal norms include person's "judgment about what should or should not be done by the person" (Mackie et al., 2015, p. 29). In this study women's perceptions of empowerment may have been affected by the norms that prevail in Ramsar and, more broadly, in Iran. For example, some of the women who indicated they were somewhat empowered stated that they were unable to achieve their goals due to what was deemed "normative" behavior by their husbands or families. The norm in Iran is for a woman to prioritize her husband and family if she does not want to jeopardize her marriage. Further, women are not expected to enter male-dominated businesses (e.g., engineering), or to attain high level positions. These norms were problematic for some women because they had worked hard to obtain better jobs as a result of their education/training. For instance, one participant who was a successful business woman, popular, well-respected, and philanthropic, said she had expected to be running several factories rather than a single business in Ramsar. Her goal was not achieved because her husband had barred her from accepting more responsibilities.

Because I did not explicitly ask women about norms, future research is necessary to substantiate the link between norms and women's perceptions of empowerment. It would also be advisable to document, whether norms change over time and how those changes affect women's perceptions of empowerment?

**Tourism empowerment frameworks: Are they applicable, particularly in Iran?**

Several findings from this study fully or partially supported empowerment dimensions comprising the tourism empowerment frameworks proposed by Scheyvens (1999). For example, I found that women who had a job in tourism and earned income felt empowered, lending support to Scheyvens' economic dimension of empowerment. In addition, I found that self-confidence was a sign of empowerment. For women who worked outside their home, specifically those who worked in tourism, being exposed to different people and to different cultures raised their self-confidence and increased their ability to interact with strangers and those who were different from them in terms of social class. This finding is in line with the social empowerment component of both frameworks. And, in terms of the political empowerment component proposed by Scheyvens and Boley and McGehee, it was partially validated through women's ability to make decisions. Finally, I found that women who were barred by their husbands or fathers from making their own decision about attending school or accepting senior managerial jobs did not feel empowered. In both frameworks the inability of individuals to make choices was a sign of disempowerment.

The data did not support Scheyvens' (1999) notion of social disempowerment, which includes, but is not limited to, prostitution, traffic, and displacement. Women were asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of empowerment and the impact tourism has had on their ability to be empowered. They did not talk in detail about negative social impacts (which would include disempowerment) of tourism. They may not have openly talked about social disempowerment because their journey through the process of empowerment differs from that of individuals in other tourism (e.g., more or

less developed tourism destinations) or cultural (e.g., non-patriarchic) contexts. Or, they may not have discussed social disempowerment because of social norms. In Iran it is not appropriate to openly talk about sensitive issues such as prostitution. In this study women hinted at the issue, but did not feel comfortable discussing it in any detail.

Additionally, the data did not lend support to Scheyvens' (1999) and Boley and McGehee's (2014) argument that empowerment is exemplified through a sense of community cohesion. In this study, the only collective activities women referred to were women's participation in an informal group, which provided women with economic benefits, efforts to start a cooperative, and one woman's leadership role as the head of an NGO. The informal group referred to in this study gathers monthly and contributes a specified amount of money to a pool of money that is distributed to one of the members each month as a loan. Women in this group have the opportunity to socialize with their peers and are able to borrow money they need to pay for their family or individual needs (e.g., traveling to Karbala to visit Emam Hosein's Shrine). In terms of the cooperative, one woman wanted to employ a handful of women to make traditional clothes. Her idea failed because she did not have a union to work with, it was difficult to inform women of the resource, and more. The failure of the cooperative was unfortunate as the woman who wanted to start it became aware through her efforts that the Heritage, Handicraft, and Tourism Organization in Ramsar facilitated obtaining health insurance to handicraft makers. With respect to the NGO, the founder went to different institutions (e.g., the local government) and asked them to provide women with sources for their economic development. At the same time, she made women aware of their legal rights and responded to their psychological needs through classes on self-recognition, child

nurturance, etc. While these “one-off” efforts to help women are important, they do not exemplify what Scheyvens and Boley and McGehee refer to as community cohesion.

Additional divergences from Scheyvens’ (1999) and Boley and McGehee’s (2014) frameworks were with political empowerment, which they view from a community lens, and sense of pride in one’s culture. Scheyvens and Boley and McGehee emphasized the participation of community members in decision-making processes pertaining to community projects and did not stress individuals’ ability to make decisions at a household level. In fact, Boley and McGhee’s RETS measurement does not even address individuals’ involvement in making decisions at a household level (Boley & Geither, 2016; Chen, Li, & Li, 2017; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014). In this study women were clearly involved in decision making at the household level, which contributed to their sense of empowerment. With respect to sense of pride in one’s culture, it did not appear in the results of this study. This may be because of the methodological approach adopted in this study, which allowed women to share their own interpretation of empowerment rather than using a pre-ordained list of empowerment terms. Additionally, given the limited duration of the interview women may have spoken to the most seminal forms of empowerment. Perhaps with additional probing sense of pride in one’s culture may have been introduced.

While I could not provide complete support for the frameworks proposed by Scheyvens (1999) and Boley and McGehee (2014), I still believe that Scheyvens’ framework has merit and should continue to guide empowerment research in Iran. Prior to doing this, however, empowerment must continue to be studied at the individual level with women living in different geographic areas, tourism vs. non-tourism communities,

and more. In addition, because empowerment evolves through a process, a result-oriented framework such as Scheyvens' framework does not account for different levels of empowerment. RETS (Boley & McGehee, 2014) should not be used in Iran because (a) the template was developed in a non-Iranian context in which the political, socio-cultural conditions are different, and (b) it was adapted from Scheyvens' framework and suffers from similar challenges. While none of the frameworks should be directly applied in Iran, generally speaking, several components of empowerment and disempowerment in Scheyvens' framework can be referenced when conducting research on empowerment in Iran.

### **Not a Zero-Sum Concept**

The data in this study demonstrated that empowerment is not a zero-sum concept. There is a spectrum for empowerment that includes empowered, somewhat empowered, and not empowered, all of which present differently in terms of what constitutes empowerment. This argument is contrary to the current literature, which documents signs of empowerment and disempowerment (e.g., Boley, Ayscue, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2017; Panta & Thapa, 2017; Scheyvens, 1999). This notion of "leveled empowerment" implies that a woman can be empowered and not feel empowered at the same time. Her own expectations and priorities may contribute to her belief that she is empowered, somewhat empowered, or not empowered. A woman entrepreneur who owns and runs a business, makes decisions about her family and her business, is trusted and has faith can be called empowered applying current empowerment measurements. However, the data demonstrated that this woman felt somewhat empowered because she was not able to

achieve what she wanted (e.g., occupying a senior managerial position or continuing her education). The results of this study reveal that scholars need to address leveled empowerment in that women's expectations and needs are to be prioritized based on their interpretations of empowerment and not other scholars. It is based on this prioritization that levels of empowerment can be evaluated and measured. Overall, the results of this study contributed to the literature on tourism and empowerment through finding that women's perception of empowerment is not a zero-sum game. Women can feel empowered and not empowered at the same time and this feeling can vary depending on the priorities and expectations they have for their life.

### **Limitations**

While the results provide valuable insight to the notion of empowerment, they must be interpreted with caution due to the study's limitations. First, due to the nature of snowball sampling, in which one participant introduces the next to the researcher, respondents likely introduced me to other women who had experienced similar life experiences and, as a result, may have held similar perspectives of empowerment. However, because I chose to interview three groups of women (i.e., women working in tourism, women working in other industries, homemakers) I did incorporate some diversity in to the sample. Second, some interviews happened in the presence of a third party (e.g., a friend, a customer, a colleague) whether the interviewee was a man or a woman (e.g., a male official, a female employee). Because the presence of a third person is very common in social situations in that area, I did not directly ask the third person to leave the room. At times the interviewee would talk to the third person, perhaps

influencing her response to questions asked. Third, and perhaps because of their Muslim faith and upbringing, women hesitated to openly talk about moral issues. For example, they skipped over moral issues by saying, “you need to put up with people’s many looks” or “I don’t want to go into details,” and/or using a gesture implying that I should know what they mean. Fourth, my accent and bearing, the clothing I wore during the interviews, even the I-phone I carried, may have affected women’s response to the questions I asked. I made every effort to wear clothing acceptable in Ramsar, hide my cell phone, and respect cultural mores, but I recognize that my being an outsider may have affected women’s willingness to speak freely with me. Fifth, the interviews were conducted in Farsi and later translated into English. During translation I found some words did not directly translate, which despite seeking verification, may have affected the results.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Multiple perspectives from the fields of psychology, management, health, political science, and women’s studies have influenced the literature on empowerment. The results of this study suggest that scholars interested in studying women and empowerment in the future should build their research primarily from the perspectives presented through the psychology and women’s studies literature. The psychological perspective has been one of the most influential perspectives driving women’s empowerment research. It allows for women’s individual attributes as well as women’s interaction with their environment. However, it is reductionist and thus requires more

constructs (e.g., economic and social) when it comes to studying women's perspective of empowerment.

The perspective presented through women's studies offers a more comprehensive template for the study of women's empowerment. Similar to psychology, women's studies benefits from well-cited frameworks (see Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1997), which approach women's empowerment from intrapersonal and relational perspectives thus accounting for psychological, economic, political, and social dimensions of empowerment.

Both perspectives (i.e., those drawn from psychology and women's studies) have been applied in the field of tourism by Scheyvens (1999) and others (e.g., Annes & Wright, 2015; Boley & McGehee, 2014). However, Scheyvens' framework was not developed for the study of women per se. It focused on individual's empowerment in relation to tourism development and failed, for example, to account for individuals' engagement in their household. If tourism scholars do not explore women's involvement in power dynamics, specifically at the household level, they will not truly understand the role tourism plays in empowering women in many parts of the world.

Many studies focusing on women's empowerment have been conducted by and/or for international organizations and used universal templates, which theoretically address empowerment in any context. Due to the context specific nature of empowerment, these universal templates do not work, particularly when the indicators do not sufficiently or holistically address women's empowerment. I used a qualitative data collection approach, which allowed me to focus on women's experience of empowerment in their unique context. By adopting a qualitative approach two new themes of empowerment were



uncovered. I wonder, however, whether more time in the field would have resulted in even more themes of empowerment. According to Cresswell (2013), ethnography is the best way to study concepts such as empowerment. Thus, in the future, researchers should adopt an ethnographic approach built off of psychological and women's studies perspectives to study women's empowerment.

To the best of my knowledge no longitudinal ethnographic studies have been conducted on women's empowerment and tourism. Given findings from life course research (e.g., Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2002; Moen, Elder, & Lüscher, 1995), longitudinal studies that account for women and the changes (individual, familial, etc.) they experience over time will allow researchers to evaluate whether the process of empowerment varies across the life course, and precisely document level-based (i.e., empowered, somewhat empowered, to not empowered) empowerment. Researchers can focus on leveled empowerment through exploring women's interpretation of empowerment throughout the different stages of their life. For example, in this study, some women did not feel completely empowered. Why didn't they feel empowered and does this feeling vary over the life course? And, if their feeling does vary, how does it vary and in what ways? Researchers could also track changes that take place in women's perceptions of empowerment, causes for these changes, problems or achievements they had, how socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions affected their perceptions, if any, and more.

In addition, because context matters, researchers should conduct comparative studies (in this case between women living in different tourism destinations throughout Iran) to confirm whether distinct forms of empowerment exist for women. Conducting research with women living in other Muslim cultures would also prove valuable, particularly given the “faith” theme uncovered in this study.

### **Pathways to Empowering Women**

Several women in this study mentioned limited access to money and/or their inability to obtain a loan were the main barriers to reaching their goals. In addition, many women recognized how important successful management of a budget is to the well-being of their household. This was particularly true for women whose husbands had declared bankruptcy, been incarcerated, or lost their jobs. In response, the Iranian government and other regional and local organizations responsible for distributing loans and other sources of funding should work with female entrepreneurs, local groups led by women, etc. to identify what sources of funding are needed, how to best communicate their existence, distribution options, as well as methods for sustaining such initiatives. Further, because women are taking on fiscal responsibility for their households, which many are not prepared to do, workshops that focus not only on money management, but also on leadership, improvement of social skills, and self-confidence should be offered. Planning workshops that help women to develop their leadership and social skills would also be helpful for women who lack self-confidence or are unable to communicate with strangers.

Family culture was also a barrier to goal attainment. In some cases, a husband or father did not allow a woman to continue her education whereas in other cases a husband's lack of ambition resulted in his wife's inability to obtain a bank loan. Hence, programs focused on family relations, mutual understanding, and individuals' rights should be delivered through women's organizations as well as schools, particularly at the primary and high school levels.

Several respondents had difficulty promoting and selling their products. Thus, entrepreneurship workshops focused on educating women about practical strategies for adding value to their products (e.g., packaging); how to promote their products (e.g., using social media); how to sell their products inside and outside of Iran; and decision-making strategies for their life and their business should be introduced. Aligned with these workshops, successful female entrepreneurs should be invited to talk about how they achieved success on public TV programs. Being able to see empowered, successful women on TV will encourage other women to implement their ideas or find mentors to lead them through the process of starting a business. Having successful female entrepreneurs discuss their success on public TV will also help to develop a culture of acceptance for female entrepreneurs and women in business roles, particularly senior positions. This strategy may also result in less social stigma for women who want to advance themselves through business, education, and more.

Community leaders can play a crucial role in connecting local women with the government and other organizations inside and outside Ramsar. NGOs can act as a liaison between women and officials. For example, an NGO in Ramsar managed to convince officials to dedicate a free space in the Handicraft fair held annually in high season in

Ramsar to women who attended its educational classes. While a positive step forward, the efforts of this one NGO are not enough to address the many different issues, problems, and concerns facing women in Ramsar. To begin, a meeting between the town council and local people representing both men and women should be held in an effort to raise awareness of women's problems and develop strategies for solving them. In addition, a committee consisting of male and female heads of NGOs, leaders in private businesses, village heads, and Basij bases in mosques should be created with the aim of coming up with creative ways of improving all women's quality of life, no matter their social class. Actively involving men in the committee would be advisable as they could provide business advice, contribute to material presented in workshops, and more. Their involvement might also lead to elevating cooperation between men and women at the household and work levels.

I recognize that the Councilor for Women Issues already holds monthly meetings with women from different governmental organizations to ask them about ways to fund and host celebrations linked to women's holidays (e.g., celebrating Mother's Day, which is Prophet Zahra's birthday). While holding monthly meetings with women is important, it is not enough. The Councilor should ask local and national business founders and philanthropists to help fund empowerment-related projects run by the local government.

The Ramsar Region, not to mention, Iran overall, is poor in terms of research in the social sciences, particularly tourism. If women are to progress socially and economically, qualitative and/or mixed methods studies must be conducted to investigate women's legal, psychological, economic, socio-cultural, and political situations. Such research should be done collaboratively between university faculty, local leaders and

representatives of tourism organizations. It should be funded by the government and involve university students as researchers. The results should be distributed widely through local TV and radio programs and via workshops. Doing so will raise awareness of the challenges faced and benefits accrued by women who work outside the home, particularly in tourism.

The results of social science research should also be used to develop tourism plans that address all of aspects of women's empowerment. This study found that women were not offered senior managerial positions in governmental hotels. Human rights activist groups must react to such discrimination by meeting with local tourism and governmental officials and presenting rationale (rooted in Islam) for promoting women. This approach has proven effective in the past when discriminatory laws against women (e.g., taking senior level judiciary positions) were changed when the argument was based on Islam.

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## Appendix A

### Research questions and interview guides

<b><i>INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FEMALE RESIDENTS (tourism jobs/non-tourism jobs/ housewives)</i></b>	
<b><i>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i></b>	<b><i>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</i></b>
<p>1. What are women’s perspectives on “empowerment”?</p>	<p>A. Think about a woman you think has made progress in her life and tell me why you think she is empowered?</p> <p>B. What do you think has helped her to become empowered?</p> <p>C. Do you feel you are empowered? If yes, why? If no, why not?</p> <p>D. Do you think you are empowered? (for those who did not mention themselves in B)</p> <p>E. Whether or not you feel empowered, have there been impediments to your achieving your hopes/dreams? If yes, tell me about those impediments.  If no, tell me why you feel you didn’t have any impediments.</p> <p>F. Have you asked anyone else to help you to achieve your goals or overcome the problems? If yes, how? If no, why not?</p> <p>G. Have you assisted someone to make decision? If yes, how? If not, why not?</p>

	<p>H. If you were empowered what would you do with your life? Then, how come your life were different (for those who feel they have not anything in their life).</p> <p>I. Are you involved in decision-making within household and/or at the work place? If yes, how?</p> <p>J. Is there any difference between you and your colleague or your husband in home/workplace in terms of income, decision-making, wage, benefits and people's interaction with you?</p> <p>K. If you are not employed in tourism, are you interested in working in tourism?</p> <p>L. How does your family think if you start working in tourism?</p> <p>M. How does the community (e.g. neighbors, friends) think about you working in tourism?</p> <p><b>Additional Probes...</b></p> <p>N. Do you think you have control over your life? Why/How?</p> <p>O. What is your role/husband's role inside and outside home?</p> <p>P. How do you think women are treated in your community?</p>
<p>2. How has tourism contributed to the empowerment (or disempowerment) of women?</p>	<p>A. What was your first experience with tourism?</p> <p>B. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you learned about tourism.</p> <p>C. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings changed since becoming involved in tourism?</p>


	<p>D. What positive changes, if any, have occurred in your life since you became involved in tourism?</p> <p>E. What negative changes, if any, have occurred in your life since you became involved in tourism?</p> <p>F. If you own a business in tourism, do you plan to expand it? If yes, what is your plan and how will you implement it?</p> <p><b>Probes:</b></p> <p>What problems do you have related to your work in tourism in your family?</p> <p>What problems do you have related to your work in outside of house?</p> <p>Have you tried to overcome the problems? Why yes/no? How?</p> <p>Do like working in tourism? Please explain.</p> <p>What do you think your family/friends/neighbors think about you working in tourism?</p> <p><b>Respondents were also asked their:</b> Age, length of residency, occupation, marital status and level of education.</p>
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<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS (KEY INFORMANTS)</b>	
	<p><b>Tourism projects/plans</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please tell me how is your organization is connected to tourism, if any? Are you involved in the process of planning and implementation of plans for tourism development? If yes, how?</li> <li>2. Describe the barriers, if any, regarding tourist visitations, the development of tourism projects in the town, etc.?</li> </ol> <p><b>Involvement of women in tourism</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Tell me what you think about involving women in tourism as hosts?</li> <li>4. What do you expect from women in terms of participation in tourism?</li> <li>5. Describe the barriers that exist for women who want to participate in tourism activities or feel empowered through tourism?</li> <li>6. Describe the opportunities that exist for women who want to participate in tourism activities or feel empowered through tourism?</li> <li>7. How can these barriers be overcome, if at all?</li> <li>8. What are the policies, if any, about involving women in tourism?</li> </ol> <p><b>Empowered women</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. I would like to close the interview by asking you some general questions:</li> <li>10. How would you define an empowered woman?</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>11. Why do you think an empowered woman has these characteristics?</li><li>12. Would you like seeing more women working in tourism? Why?</li><li>13. What should be done to make women in the region powerful?</li></ol> <p><b>Respondents were also asked their:</b> Age, length of residency, occupation, marital status and level of education.</p>
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## Appendix B

## IRB Approval

 <b>PENNSTATE</b> <small>IRB Program Office for Research Protections</small>		<small>Vice President for Research The Pennsylvania State University 205 The 330 Building University Park, PA 16802</small>	<small>Phone: (814) 865-1775 Fax: (814) 863-9699 Email: <a href="mailto:protections@psu.edu">protections@psu.edu</a> Web: <a href="http://www.research.psu.edu/irp">www.research.psu.edu/irp</a></small>
<b>EXEMPTION DETERMINATION</b>			
<b>Date:</b> April 11, 2016			
<b>From:</b> Courtney Whetzel, IRB Analyst			
<b>To:</b> Yeganeh Aghazamani			
Type of Submission:	Initial Study		
Title of Study:	Exploring empowerment of local women through tourism in rural Iran: A case of Ramsar province		
Principal Investigator:	Yeganeh Aghazamani		
Study ID:	STUDY00004714		
Submission ID:	STUDY00004714		
Funding:	Not Applicable		
Documents Approved:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview guide for community leaders.docx (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument</li> <li>• Interview guide for female residents.docx (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument</li> <li>• Interview guide for male residents.docx (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument</li> <li>• Reviewed IRB proposal 4.7.pdf (0.02), Category: IRB Protocol</li> </ul>		
<p>The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.</p> <p>Continuing Progress Reports are <b>not</b> required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.</p> <p>Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.</p> <p>Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (<a href="#">HRP-103</a>), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (<a href="http://irb.psu.edu">http://irb.psu.edu</a>).</p> <p>This correspondence should be maintained with your records.</p>			
ID00000027			

## VITA

### Yeganeh Aghazamani

#### EDUCATION

- 2013-2018 Ph. D., Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA  
*Dissertation title: Pathways to womens' empowerment in Northern Iran*
- 2009-2012 M.S., Geography and Tourism Planning, The Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran  
*Thesis title: Tourism as a tool for sustainable development in desert areas: A case of the village of Fahraj*
- 1999-2002 B.S., Animal Biology, The University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2013-2017 **Teaching and Research Assistant**, Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
- 2015 **Business strategist**, Humanitarian Engineering and Social Entrepreneurship Group, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
- 2010-2013 **Research Supervisor**, Peyman Gostaran Sepehr Consulting Firm  
Tehran, IRAN
- 2003-2009 **Freelance Tutor**, Tehran, Iran

#### PUBLICATIONS

##### Non-Academic (World Bank Group):

Twining-Ward, L., Zhou, V., Sheils, D., Gimelli, N., Neville, H., Sager, C., Micallef, B., Cain, C., Bakker, M., **Aghazamani, Y.**, & Ferguson, L. (2017). Women and tourism: Designing for inclusion. *World Bank Group*, 1-20.

##### Academic:

**Aghazamani, Y.**, & Hunt, C. (2017). Empowerment in tourism: A review of peer-reviewed literature. *Tourism Review International*, 21 (4), 333-346.

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**Aghazamani, Y.**, & Ghaderi, E. (2013). Tourism as a tool for sustainable development in desert areas: A case of the village of Fahraj. *Geographical Journal of Space Tourism*, 2(8), 37-58 (in Persian).