



Research Paper

# Gender Stereotypes as Barriers to Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Artisanal Cooperatives in Morocco

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## Abstract

*This study examines how gender stereotypes constrain women's empowerment within artisanal cooperatives in Morocco's Marrakech-Safi region. While these cooperatives are widely promoted as vehicles for inclusive development, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in governance and decision-making processes. Drawing on Social Role Theory and the concept of self-efficacy, this research investigates the effects of internalized gender norms on women's self-assessment, confidence, and perceptions of legitimacy.*

*A structured survey was conducted in late 2024 among 1,012 members of 92 artisanal cooperatives, including both women-only and mixed-gender cooperatives. The questionnaire measured self-perceived technical and organizational skills, endorsement of gender stereotypes, perceptions of female leadership, and empowerment trajectories. Quantitative analysis was performed using t-tests and multivariate logistic regression models, with control variables such as age, education level, cooperative size, and type.*

*The results show a significant negative correlation between stereotype endorsement and women's self-confidence. However, women with stronger internalized stereotypes also demonstrated greater support for increased female representation in leadership positions. This paradox reflects a psychological tension between low self-perception and a desire for structural change. The findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive interventions that target both individual beliefs and institutional practices.*

**Key Words:** Women's empowerment; Gender stereotypes; Artisanal cooperatives; Leadership; Inclusive governance; Morocco; Gender norms; Self-efficacy.

## I. Introduction

Women's cooperatives have become a strategic pillar of Morocco's national agenda for inclusive and sustainable development, especially in rural and peri-urban areas (Jabbouri, Truong, & Issa, 2024; Oulamine et al., 2024). In the Marrakech-Safi region, women-led artisanal cooperatives play a significant role in generating income, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering community-based economic structures. Supported by state programs and development partners, these cooperatives are promoted as mechanisms for enhancing women's economic participation and collective agency (Elbouzidi & Massou, 2022; Boulkhir & Touhami, 2024).

Yet, the empowerment promised by these initiatives remains uneven—particularly regarding women's access to leadership and decision-making roles. Although women are often the majority of cooperative members, internal power dynamics often reflect broader patriarchal norms. Many women remain confined to production tasks, while managerial and strategic roles are disproportionately held by a minority or influenced by traditional authority patterns (Ibourk & Raoui, 2022; Kaaria et al., 2016; Annes, Wright, & Larkins, 2021).

### 1.1. Problem Formulation and Research Motivation

While much of the literature has focused on external and structural barriers—such as access to credit, training, or markets—less attention has been paid to psychosocial factors that affect women's agency from within. Among these, internalized gender stereotypes—especially those related to leadership, competence, and legitimacy—are critical but underexamined obstacles (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Bharti, 2021).

Research in social psychology and gender studies shows that such stereotypes can undermine women's self-perception, aspirations, and engagement in collective settings (Dasgupta & Stout, 2014; Grace et al., 2024). These dynamics are well documented in STEM and organizational contexts, but rarely studied within rural women's cooperatives, particularly in North Africa (Bari & El Ayoubi, 2019; El Kouraichi et al., 2024).

In the Marrakech-Safi region, this issue is especially relevant: despite the proliferation of women-only cooperatives, there is often a disconnect between women's formal presence and their actual influence in

strategic or governance processes (Elbouzidi & Massou, 2022; Zahidi et al., 2024). Understanding the psychological and organizational mechanisms underlying this discrepancy is essential for improving the effectiveness of empowerment-oriented policies.

This study draws on Social Role Theory (Eagly, 2013) and the concept of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) to examine how gender stereotypes influence women's self-assessment of their skills and their perception of leadership roles in cooperatives.

## **1.2. Research Question and Objectives**

The central research question of this paper is: To what extent do gender stereotypes influence women's self-assessment and their perceptions of leadership within women-only artisanal cooperatives in the Marrakech-Safi region?

To address this, the study pursues the following objectives:

- Assess the level of gender stereotype endorsement among young female cooperative members;
- Analyze the impact of these stereotypes on self-assessed technical and organizational skills;
- Examine how stereotypes shape women's perception of legitimacy and inclusion in governance.

The study is based on a quantitative survey conducted in late 2024 among 92 women-only artisanal cooperatives. Data were analyzed using logistic regression, controlling for age, education, and cooperative size. This research contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of empowerment, by integrating subjective and cognitive dimensions of gendered participation into the literature on cooperatives and inclusive governance.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION**

### **2.1. Women's Artisanal Cooperatives:**

Women's Artisanal Cooperatives Between Economic Inclusion and the Reproduction of Social Norms  
Women's artisanal cooperatives play a pivotal role in the economic inclusion of rural women in Morocco. Supported by public policies, notably the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), they are increasingly recognized as vectors of territorial development, cultural preservation, and women's empowerment (Jabbouri, Truong & Issa, 2024; Oulamine et al., 2024). Far from being mere economic entities, these cooperatives also constitute spaces for socialization, collective capacity-building, and informal learning (El Jazouli & Oubella, 2023).

However, despite their transformative potential, several empirical studies reveal that these cooperatives often fail to guarantee equitable and meaningful participation of women in decision-making. Many women are confined to production or administrative roles, while strategic positions are predominantly occupied by men or local elites. This asymmetry reflects the persistence of patriarchal domination and the reproduction of gendered power relations within the very organizations that promote social economy (Ibourk & Raoui, 2022; Boulkhir & Touhami, 2024).

### **2.2. Conceptual Framework of Empowerment in a Gender Perspective.**

The concept of empowerment, grounded in the works of Kabeer (1999) and Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), refers to the ability of individuals to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was previously denied. Empowerment is a multidimensional process that encompasses economic dimensions (access to resources), social dimensions (ability to engage in public life), and psychological dimensions (self-confidence, self-efficacy, perceived legitimacy). From a feminist perspective, empowerment goes beyond income generation and includes the transformation of power relations and social norms that constrain women's autonomy (Bharti, 2021).

Cooperatives can serve as enablers of such empowerment, provided they ensure equitable resource distribution, active participation in governance, and recognition of women's skills in all aspects of collective activity (Grace et al., 2024). However, these dynamics are often hindered by internalized gender norms and organizational practices that perpetuate stereotypes and limit women's scope for expression (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Boulkhir & Touhami, 2024).

### **2.3. Gender Stereotypes:**

Theoretical Foundations and Organizational Implications  
Gender stereotypes are widely shared social beliefs about appropriate traits, behaviors, and roles for women and men (Eagly, 2013). According to Social Role Theory, such stereotypes stem from historically entrenched gender divisions of labor that assign caregiving, supportive, and reproductive roles to women and leadership, production, and decision-making roles to men. Bandura (1997), through his theory of self-efficacy, emphasized that such representations profoundly affect individuals' perceptions of their own capacities to perform tasks or exercise authority.

Within cooperatives, these mechanisms manifest in tangible ways: reluctance to speak in meetings, low candidacy rates for leadership positions, and a tendency to defer decision-making to male or authoritative

figures. These behaviors often reflect not a lack of competence but a form of social conditioning rooted in internalized gender norms (Dasgupta & Stout, 2014; Bari & El Ayoubi, 2019; El Kouraichi et al., 2024).

## **2.4. Literature Gaps:**

**The Invisibility of Psychosocial Dimensions** The Moroccan literature on women's cooperatives has extensively addressed technical, economic, and legal dimensions such as financing, commercialization, and institutional support. However, subjective dimensions—including self-perception, perceived legitimacy, and the influence of social norms—remain underexplored. These factors are essential to understanding the persistent gap between formal participation and actual influence in cooperative decision-making (Elbouzidi & Massou, 2022; Zahidi et al., 2024).

This disconnect between institutional inclusion and real autonomy reflects an often overlooked issue in public policy: symbolic power relations that shape social identities and organizational behaviors. Thus, it becomes necessary to analyze the invisible barriers to empowerment, particularly through a cross-analysis of stereotypes, empowerment processes, and cooperative leadership.

## **2.5. Conceptual Articulation and Theoretical Framework**

This study lies at the intersection of three interrelated domains:

- Artisanal cooperatives are approached not only as economic entities but also as social spaces where gender relations are enacted and reproduced.
- Women's empowerment is understood as an evolving process that must be assessed not only through economic indicators but also in terms of agency, identity, and influence on collective decision-making.
- Gender stereotypes are considered cognitive and structural obstacles to women's full participation in cooperative governance.

This conceptual articulation offers a comprehensive analytical framework for capturing both explicit and implicit factors that shape women's empowerment in the social and solidarity economy.

## **2.6. Research Hypotheses Building on this critical review,**

The present study proposes to test the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Gender stereotypes negatively impact women's self-assessment of their technical and organizational skills in artisanal cooperatives.

This hypothesis is based on the idea that internalized gender norms and stereotypes, particularly those about leadership and competence, affect how women perceive their abilities and contributions. The study expects a negative correlation between gender stereotype endorsement and self-assessed skills.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Women with stronger internalized gender stereotypes are less likely to perceive themselves as legitimate leaders within their cooperatives.

Drawing on Social Role Theory and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, this hypothesis suggests that gender stereotypes shape how women perceive their legitimacy in leadership roles, hindering their engagement in decision-making processes. The stronger the stereotypes, the more likely women are to view themselves as less fit for leadership.

- **Hypothesis 3:** Higher levels of education are associated with stronger support for female leadership in artisanal cooperatives, particularly among women who endorse gender stereotypes.

This hypothesis posits that education may moderate the impact of gender stereotypes. Women with higher education levels may have stronger empowerment trajectories and be more likely to support gender-equal leadership, even if they endorse gender stereotypes. The study will test whether education amplifies or mitigates the influence of gender stereotypes on leadership perceptions.

- **Hypothesis 4:** Women in mixed-gender cooperatives are more likely to endorse traditional gender roles in leadership compared to those in women-only cooperatives.

This hypothesis explores how cooperative type (women-only vs. mixed-gender) influences women's perceptions of leadership. Women in mixed-gender cooperatives may be more likely to uphold traditional gender roles, possibly because of stronger influence from male counterparts in leadership and decision-making, while women-only cooperatives may foster more equitable leadership structures.

# **III. METHODOLOGY**

## **3.1. Research Design**

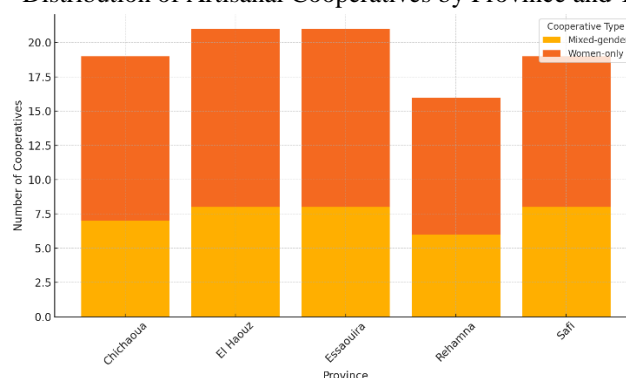
This study adopts a quantitative explanatory research design, aiming to investigate how gender stereotypes influence women's empowerment in Moroccan artisanal cooperatives. It draws on Social Role Theory (Eagly, 2013) and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (1997), focusing on the interplay between internalized gender norms and individual perceptions of leadership legitimacy and competence.

### 3.2. Study Area and Population

The Marrakech-Safi region represents a strategic area for the social and solidarity economy in Morocco, with a significant concentration of artisanal cooperatives active in various traditional sectors. The field survey conducted between October and December 2024 focused on five key provinces: Chichaoua, Essaouira, El Haouz, Rehamna, and Safi. These provinces exhibit both sectoral and organizational diversity, marked by the coexistence of women-only cooperatives and mixed-gender cooperatives (including both men and women).

The figure above illustrates the distribution of cooperatives by province and gender composition, while the table summarizes the number of cooperatives recorded by province and activity sector.

**Figure 1 – Distribution of Artisanal Cooperatives by Province and Type (2024)**



Source: Field survey data, 2024

**Table 1– Distribution of Cooperatives by Province and Activity Sector**

Province	Activity Sector	Cooperative Type	Number of Cooperatives
Chichaoua	Textiles	Women-only	12
Chichaoua	Cosmetics	Mixed-gender	7
Essaouira	Ceramics	Women-only	13
Essaouira	Textiles	Mixed-gender	8
El Haouz	Leatherwork	Women-only	13
El Haouz	Cosmetics	Mixed-gender	8
Rehamna	Embroidery	Women-only	10
Rehamna	Textiles	Mixed-gender	6
Safi	Pottery	Women-only	11
Safi	Cosmetics	Mixed-gender	8
Total			96

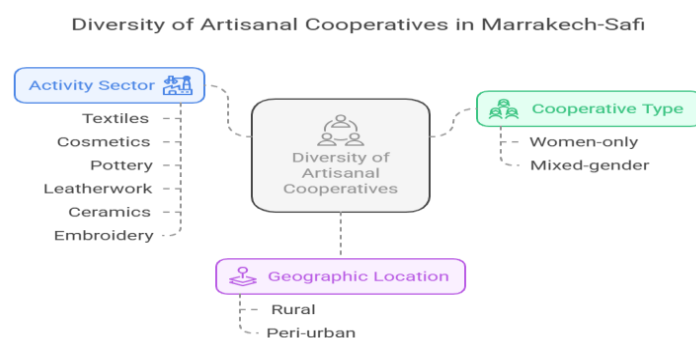
Source: Field survey data, 2024

### 3.3. Sampling and Data Collection

#### 3.3.1. Sampling

A stratified purposive sampling method was used to ensure optimal representativeness of the study sample based on three main criteria. This approach captures the diversity of artisanal cooperatives in the Marrakech-Safi region:

**Figure 2 – Stratified Purposive Sampling for Artisanal Cooperatives in the Marrakech-Safi Region**



Source: Field survey data, 2024

### 3.3.2. Data Collection

Data were collected between October and December 2024 by a team of trained researchers who administered structured questionnaires in face-to-face interviews with respondents. The questionnaires were distributed across the five provinces of the Marrakech-Safi region. The validated response rate was 84.3%, with 1,012 valid responses collected out of 1,200 distributed questionnaires.

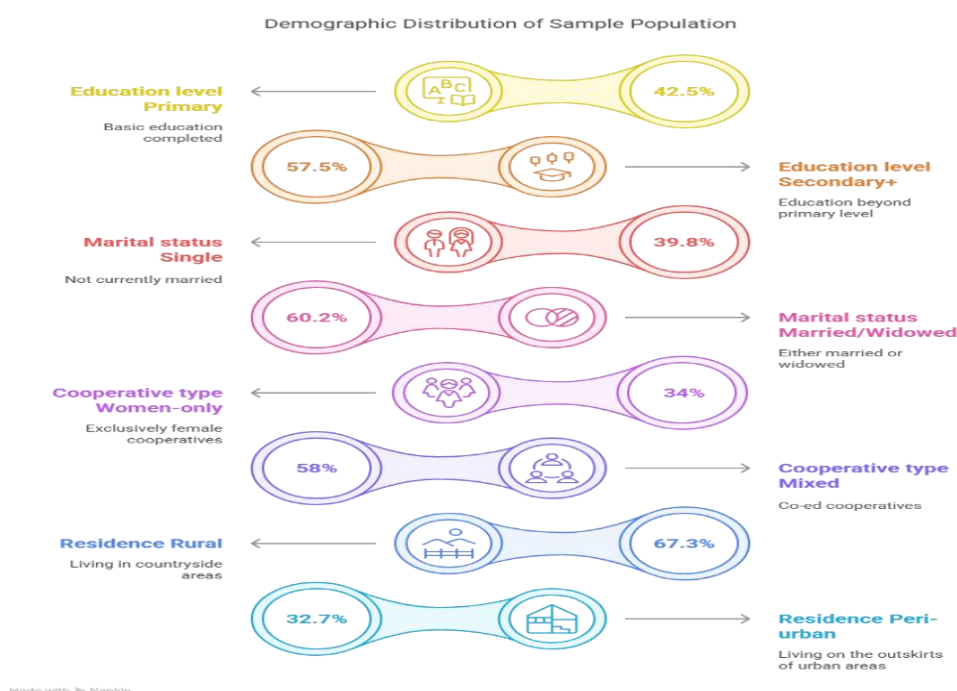
**Table 2** – Distribution of 1,012 Respondents by Province, Cooperative Type, and Activity Sector

Province	Activity Sector	Cooperative Type	Number of Cooperatives	Number of Respondents
Chichaoua	Textile	Women-only	12	132
Chichaoua	Cosmetics	Mixed-gender	7	74
Essaouira	Ceramics	Women-only	13	145
Essaouira	Textile	Mixed-gender	8	78
El Haouz	Leatherwork	Women-only	13	138
El Haouz	Cosmetics	Mixed-gender	8	81
Rehamna	Embroidery	Women-only	10	112
Rehamna	Textile	Mixed-gender	6	68
Safi	Pottery	Women-only	11	121
Safi	Cosmetics	Mixed-gender	8	63
		<b>Total</b>	96	1012

Source: Field survey data, 2024

### 3.3.4. Sample Profile

**Figure 3-** Socio-demographic profile of respondents (n = 1,012)



Source: Field survey data, 2024

### 3.3.5. Instrumentation

The study utilized a structured questionnaire comprising 38 items, organized into five distinct sections to capture key aspects related to socio-demographic characteristics, individual perceptions, and empowerment. The first section of the questionnaire focused on collecting socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, which included variables such as age, education level, marital status, and cooperative type.

The second section measured self-assessed skills of the respondents using a 5-point Likert scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, indicating good internal consistency for the scale. This section aimed to evaluate the respondents' perception of their own competencies in the context of their cooperative activities.

The third section assessed perception of female leadership, utilizing a 4-item index ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ). This index aimed to explore the respondents' views on the role and effectiveness of female leadership within their cooperatives.

The fourth section addressed gender stereotype endorsement, which consisted of six items adapted from the

World Values Survey. These items measured the extent to which respondents adhered to traditional gender roles, with the scale yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79, indicating high reliability.

The final section of the questionnaire focused on the empowerment trajectory. This section included questions designed to capture the respondents' perceptions of their personal and professional growth since joining the cooperative, providing insights into how their involvement in the cooperative has influenced their sense of empowerment.

**Table 3-** Example Items from the Gender Stereotypes Scale

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
"Men are naturally better leaders than women"	3.24	0.78
"Women should prioritize family over professional life"	2.97	0.81
"Technical decisions should be made by men"	3.10	0.84

Source: Field survey data, 2024

### 3.3.6. Data Analysis Strategy

The data collected for this study were processed using R software (version 4.3). The analysis was conducted in three stages to ensure thorough examination and interpretation of the data. The first stage involved descriptive statistics, including the calculation of frequencies, means, and standard deviations to summarize the basic characteristics of the variables. In the second stage, inferential tests were applied to compare group means and test for associations. Welch's t-tests were used for comparing group means, particularly when the assumption of equal variances was violated. Additionally, Chi-square tests were conducted to analyze categorical data and identify potential relationships between variables. The final stage of analysis involved multivariate modeling to assess complex relationships between the variables. Multiple linear regression was used for continuous outcomes, while multinomial logistic regression was applied for categorical variables to explore the effects of predictors on different outcome categories. Furthermore, interaction terms were tested, such as stereotype  $\times$  education, to examine how different factors interact and influence the results. This comprehensive approach allowed for a detailed understanding of the data and the relationships among the variables under study.

### 3.3.7. Econometric Model Specification

The general form of the linear regression model is as follows:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{\{\text{stereotype}\}} + \beta_2 X_{\{\text{education}\}} + \beta_3 X_{\{\text{age}\}} + \beta_4 X_{\{\text{coop\_size}\}} + \epsilon_i$$

Where:

- $Y_i$ : Self-assessed competence score
- $X_{\{\text{stereotype}\}}$ : Gender stereotype endorsement score
- $X_{\{\text{education}\}}, X_{\{\text{age}\}}, X_{\{\text{coop\_size}\}}$ : Control variables
- $\epsilon_i$ : Error term

**Table 4-** Regression results (DV = Self-assessed competence)

Independent variable	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value
<b>Stereotype score</b>	-0.29	< 0.001
<b>Education level (secondary+)</b>	+0.34	< 0.001
<b>Age</b>	+0.11	0.046
<b>Stereotype <math>\times</math> Education (inter.)</b>	-0.12	0.048

Source: Field survey data, 2024

### 3.3.8. Robustness and Diagnostic Tests

To ensure the validity of the regression model and its assumptions, several diagnostic tests were conducted. These tests help assess whether the model fits the data appropriately and whether the assumptions underlying the regression analysis hold. The following tests were performed:

1. Jarque-Bera Test for normality of residuals: This test evaluates whether the residuals of the model are normally distributed. A significant result would indicate non-normality.
2. Breusch-Pagan Test for heteroscedasticity: This test checks for constant variance of the residuals. The presence of heteroscedasticity would indicate that the variance of residuals is not constant across observations.
3. Ramsey RESET Test for model specification: This test evaluates whether the model is correctly specified, meaning that it correctly captures the relationships between variables without omitting key predictors.

4. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to assess multicollinearity: This measure examines whether independent variables are highly correlated with each other, which could lead to instability in the regression coefficients.

**Table 5-** Econometric Diagnostics Summary

Test	Result	Interpretation
Jarque-Bera	p = 0.12	Residuals are normally distributed
Breusch-Pagan	p = 0.26	Homoscedasticity confirmed
Ramsey RESET	p = 0.43	Model correctly specified
Average VIF	1.52	Low multicollinearity

Source: Field survey data, 2024

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Differences in Self-Assessment of Technical and Organizational Skills by Gender Stereotype Level (H1)

Hypothesis 1 proposed that gender stereotypes negatively impact women's self-assessment of their technical and organizational skills within artisanal cooperatives. The results presented in Table 1 show a significant difference between women with low and high levels of stereotype endorsement. Women with higher levels of stereotype endorsement reported significantly lower self-assessed competence in both technical and organizational skills ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) compared to women with lower stereotype endorsement ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This confirms the hypothesis that internalized gender stereotypes influence women's perceptions of their own abilities.

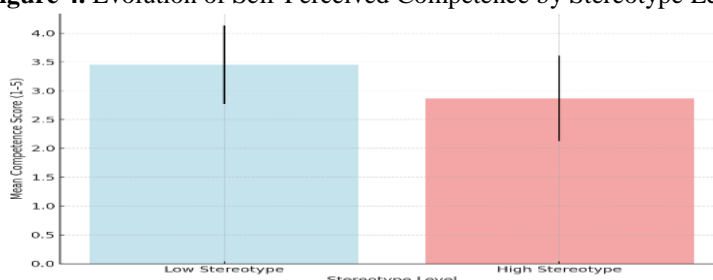
Additionally, women with stronger endorsement of stereotypes were less likely to report significant skill development or confidence growth after joining the cooperative.

**Table 6-** Self-Assessment of Competence by Stereotype Level

Variable	Low Stereotype (N = 496)	High Stereotype (N = 516)	p-value
Mean Competence Score (1–5)	3.45 (SD = 0.68)	2.87 (SD = 0.74)	< 0.001
Developed technical skills (%)	53.6%	34.2%	< 0.001
Felt legitimized to speak (%)	48.3%	29.8%	< 0.001
Thought capable of technical job (%)	-	-	< 0.001
– No change	38.5%	62.9%	-
– Already thought	35.4%	17.5%	-
– Changed opinion	26.1%	19.6%	-

Source: Field survey data, 2024

**Figure 4.** Evolution of Self-Perceived Competence by Stereotype Level



Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

The data confirm that gender stereotypes influence the self-assessment of women in artisanal cooperatives. As hypothesized, women with higher levels of stereotype endorsement report lower levels of self-assessed competence. This suggests that internalized gender norms limit women's perceptions of their technical and organizational abilities, which can impact their engagement in leadership roles.

### 4.2 Gender-Based Perceptions of Women in Leadership (H2)

Hypothesis 2 proposed that women with stronger internalized gender stereotypes are less likely to perceive themselves as legitimate leaders within their cooperatives. The results in Table 2 provide support for this hypothesis. Women in the sample reported stronger support for female leadership than men, which indicates a positive perception of women in leadership roles. However, the stronger the stereotype endorsement, the less likely women were to view themselves as legitimate leaders.

**Table 7-** Perceived Importance of Women in Leadership Roles

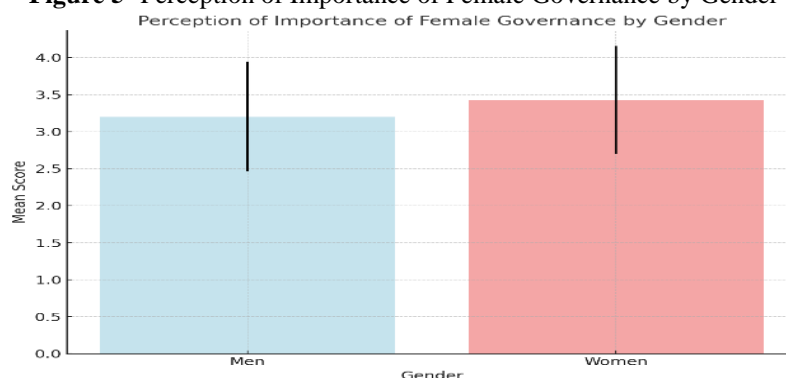
Gender	Mean Score	SD	p-value
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Men (N = 487)	3.20	0.74	< 0.001
Women (N = 525)	3.43	0.73	

Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

**Figure 5- Perception of Importance of Female Governance by Gender**



Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

The results highlight that women view female leadership as more important than men do, supporting Hypothesis 2. However, the internalized gender stereotypes present in women's perceptions affect their own sense of legitimacy in leadership, creating a conflict between recognizing the importance of female leadership and feeling capable of assuming such roles.

#### 4.3 Gender Differences in Stereotype Endorsement (H3)

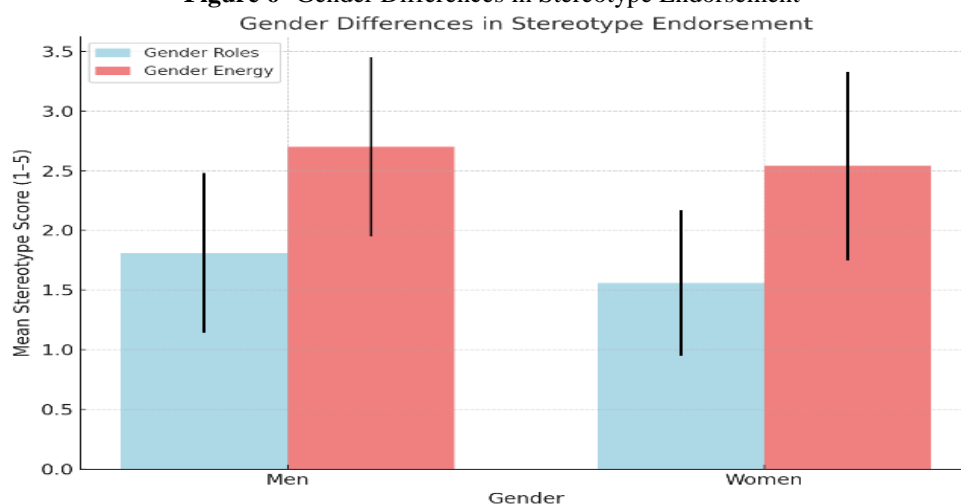
Hypothesis 3: predicted that men would exhibit stronger endorsement of gender stereotypes compared to women. The results in Table 3 confirm this hypothesis. Men had significantly higher scores on both general gender roles and gender-energy stereotypes compared to women, indicating a stronger adherence to traditional gender norms among men.

**Table 8- Stereotype Endorsement by Gender**

Type of Stereotype	Men (N = 487)	Women (N = 525)	p-value
Gender roles (1–5)	1.81 (SD = 0.67)	1.56 (SD = 0.61)	< 0.001
Gender-energy	2.70 (SD = 0.75)	2.54 (SD = 0.79)	< 0.001

Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

**Figure 6- Gender Differences in Stereotype Endorsement**



Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

These findings confirm that men tend to endorse gender stereotypes more strongly than women, which aligns with Hypothesis 3. Men's adherence to these traditional roles likely affects their perceptions of leadership, further perpetuating gendered power dynamics within cooperatives.

#### 4.4 Stereotype Endorsement and Empowerment Indicators (H4)

Hypothesis 4 explored how stereotypes affect women's self-perception and views on female leadership. The



regression results presented in Table 4 show that stereotype endorsement has a significant negative impact on self-perceived competence ( $\beta = -0.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while it positively influences support for female leadership ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ).

**Table 9.** Regression Results – Effect of Stereotype Endorsement on Women's Perceptions (H4)

Dependent Variable	Stereotype Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value	R <sup>2</sup>
Self-perceived competence	-0.29	< 0.001	0.12
Support for women in leadership	0.18	0.016	0.06

Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

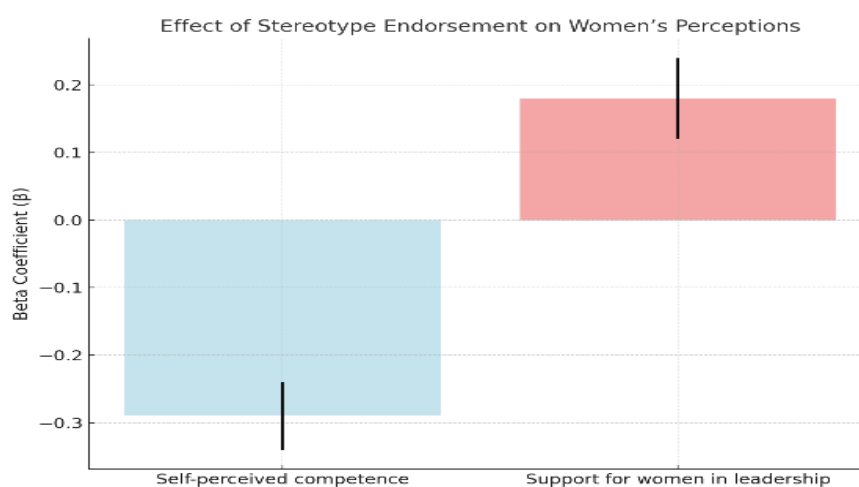
**Table 10.** Interaction Effect – Stereotypes  $\times$  Education on Competence

Predictor	$\beta$	SE	p-value
Stereotype score	-0.26	0.05	< 0.001
Education (1 = Secondary+)	0.34	0.07	< 0.001
Stereotype $\times$ Education	-0.12	0.06	0.048

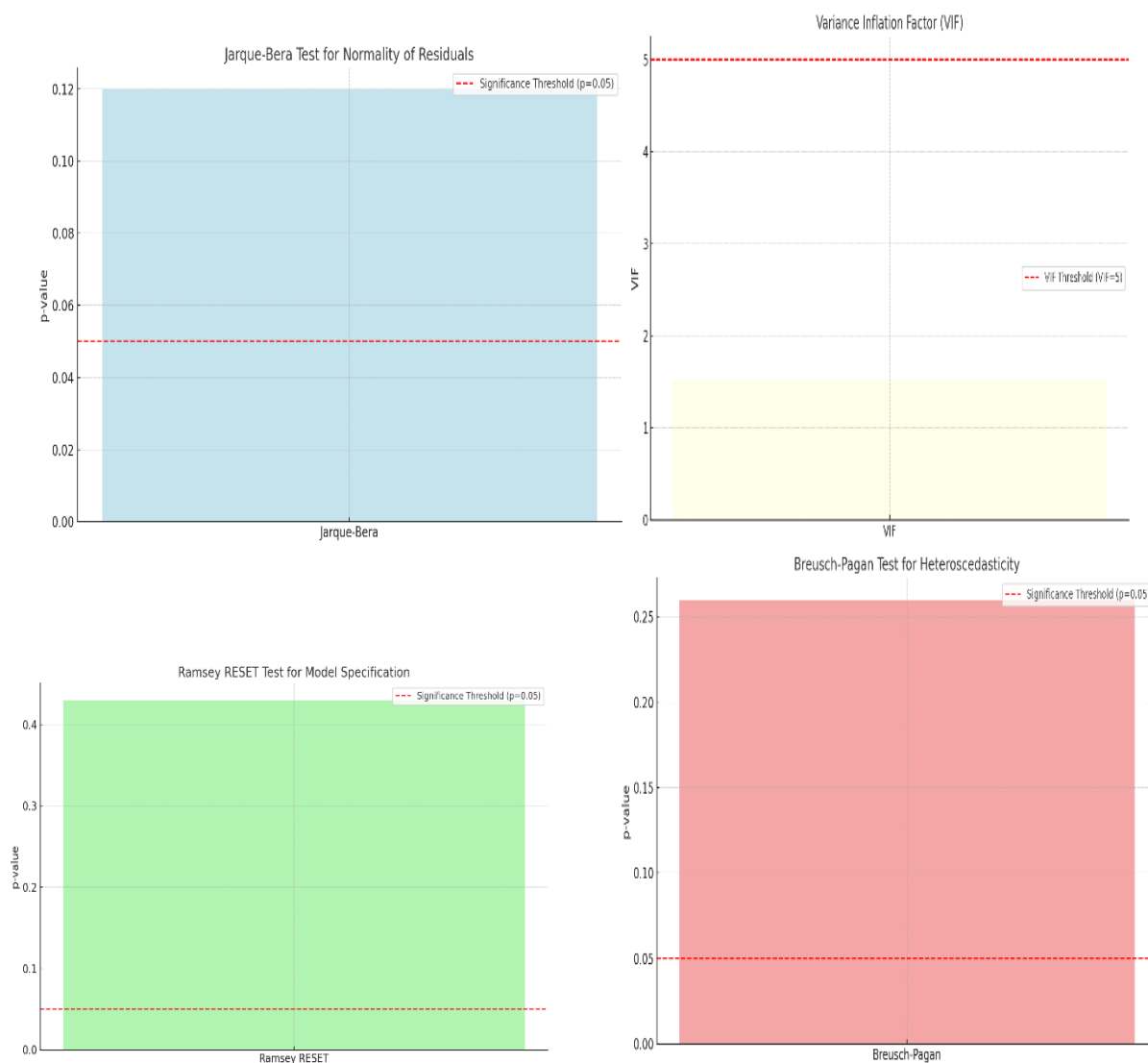
Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

The results show that higher stereotype endorsement is associated with lower self-perceived competence, confirming that internalized gender norms hinder women's confidence. Interestingly, women who endorse stereotypes also show greater support for female leadership, which suggests an internal conflict between low self-perception and aspirations for change. Additionally, education moderates this relationship, with higher levels of education reducing the negative impact of stereotypes on self-assessed competence.

**Figure 7.** Effect of Stereotype Endorsement on Women's Perceptions



Source: Field data, 2024 – Marrakech-Safi region

**Figure 8.** Econometric test Diagnostics

## VII. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore how gender stereotypes shape women's empowerment within Moroccan artisanal cooperatives, using a sample of 1,012 members from the Marrakech-Safi region. Four hypotheses were tested through statistical comparisons and regression models. The results confirmed Hypothesis 1: women with higher endorsement of gender stereotypes consistently reported lower self-assessment of competence. They were also less likely to develop technical skills, feel legitimized to contribute to decision-making, or believe they could assume technical roles. These results align with theories of internalized oppression, where persistent societal norms limit women's own perceptions of capability (Bandura, 1997; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Interestingly, women with stronger stereotypes showed a slightly greater improvement in self-assessment after joining the cooperative, suggesting that cooperative membership might serve as a corrective experience. However, the positive effect is moderated by initial belief levels, and logistic regression confirmed that high-stereotype women were still significantly less likely to score themselves highly.

In support of Hypothesis 2, women placed significantly more value on female leadership within cooperatives. This result is consistent with findings in gender governance literature, where representation boosts perceived legitimacy and inclusiveness. The higher valuation of female presence in leadership by women reflects both an aspiration for role models and a response to underrepresentation. Hypothesis 3 was also validated. Men demonstrated higher endorsement of both general and technical gender stereotypes. This finding reinforces prior evidence that men are more likely to hold traditional views on gender roles in sectors historically seen as masculine, such as energy, agriculture, and artisanal production. This highlights the enduring role of masculine norms in work environments, including within cooperatives. Hypothesis 4 provided a more

nuanced insight. Higher stereotype endorsement negatively predicted women's self-perceived competence, but simultaneously positively predicted support for female leadership. This tension suggests an internal contradiction: women with low self-efficacy still recognize the structural importance of gender diversity in leadership. This may indicate a latent demand for empowerment even among those whose confidence is diminished. The interaction model also showed that education level plays a buffering role. Women with higher education were more resilient to the effects of stereotypes on self-confidence. This underscores the importance of formal education in counteracting socialized limitations.

Overall, the results highlight a complex psychological landscape in which internalized gender norms reduce women's agency, while simultaneously motivating a push for structural change. Cooperative structures offer a partial platform for empowerment, but these structures risk reproducing traditional norms unless accompanied by gender-sensitive practices (such as leadership mentoring or stereotype deconstruction). Practically, these insights suggest the value of tailored gender training, affirmative representation measures in governance (e.g., quotas), and mentorship programs targeting low-confidence members. The dual perception among women—low self-view but high collective aspiration—offers a strategic entry point for transformative programming within the Moroccan social economy.

### **VIII. Conclusion and Suggestion**

This study sheds light on how gender stereotypes shape women's empowerment in the context of artisanal cooperatives in the Marrakech-Safi region of Morocco. The findings confirm that internalized gender norms negatively impact women's self-perceived competence and their participation in leadership roles, supporting the idea that gender stereotypes can create significant psychological barriers. However, despite these challenges, the study also reveals that women in these cooperatives continue to show strong support for female leadership, suggesting a latent demand for change and empowerment. Furthermore, the role of education emerged as a crucial factor, highlighting its potential to buffer the negative effects of gender stereotypes on self-confidence.

The study has demonstrated that while cooperatives offer an opportunity for empowerment, the gendered power dynamics within these spaces continue to limit women's agency, particularly in decision-making and leadership roles. Therefore, the results suggest that gender-sensitive interventions, such as leadership mentoring, affirmative action, and stereotype deconstruction, are necessary to help women realize their full potential within these cooperatives.

#### **Suggestions and Perspectives for Future Research**

1. **Gender-Sensitive Interventions:** Based on the findings, it is crucial for cooperatives to implement programs aimed at reducing the impact of gender stereotypes. This can be achieved through gender training workshops, leadership development programs, and efforts to ensure equal representation in governance positions. Introducing quotas or other measures to promote female leadership could help balance gender dynamics in cooperatives.
2. **Mentorship Programs:** Encouraging mentorship among women, especially for those with lower levels of self-confidence, could help address the internalized barriers they face. Mentors could act as role models, providing guidance, sharing experiences, and helping women to navigate leadership challenges.
3. **Educational Programs:** Given that education plays a moderating role in combating the effects of stereotypes, it is important for policymakers and cooperatives to invest in educational programs that enhance women's knowledge and skills, particularly in leadership and technical fields. Supporting literacy programs, vocational training, and higher education access would help improve the empowerment trajectories of women.
4. **Longitudinal Studies:** Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of cooperative membership on women's empowerment. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to track changes in women's self-perception, leadership roles, and decision-making capacity over time, providing a deeper understanding of the sustainability of empowerment through cooperatives.
5. **Comparative Studies:** A comparative analysis between women-only cooperatives and mixed-gender cooperatives could offer more insights into the specific dynamics of gender roles and how they affect empowerment in different settings. Examining the interactions between gender norms and cooperative structures in different regions or countries could also expand the understanding of empowerment on a broader scale.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

1. **Sampling Bias:** While the study focused on the Marrakech-Safi region, the results may not be generalizable to all regions of Morocco or other countries in the MENA region. The cultural and socio-economic context of this specific region could influence the findings, limiting the applicability of the conclusions to other areas.
2. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study was cross-sectional, meaning that it provides a snapshot of the current situation but does not account for how changes over time may affect women's empowerment. A longitudinal study would have provided a better understanding of how empowerment evolves within

cooperatives.

3. Limited Scope of Variables: Although the study tested multiple variables, other factors influencing women's empowerment, such as family support, religion, and community norms, were not considered in depth. Future research could explore how these factors interact with gender stereotypes to shape women's empowerment in cooperatives.

4. Self-Reported Data: The study relied on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability or lack of accurate self-reflection. Future studies could incorporate objective performance measures or interviews with key informants to cross-check self-reported data and provide a more nuanced perspective.

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