



An Analysis of Social Stability and Its Determining Factors among Rural Women in Iran

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ABSTRACT:-*This study is an applied piece of research adopting a descriptive-analytical method to investigate the condition of social stability and its determining factors among rural women. The population comprises rural women in villages accommodating more than 20 households, of whom 850 were selected as the sample using statistical formulae. Afterwards, using multistage sampling, the questionnaires were distributed in proportion among the women of 60 villages. Results show that social stability, at a mean of 3, is at an average level, and, among the 14 factors of social stability, the three factors of social abnormality, social accountability, and social dynamism with respective coefficients of variation of 0.233, 0.236, and 0.238 have the greatest significance in the social stability of rural women. In addition, the results of multivariate regression demonstrate that, the five independent variables of personal income, occupation, cooperation with secondary groups, level of education and the income of the head of the household account in total for 673 percent of the variance of the dependent variable (social stability of rural women).*

KEYWORDS:-*Sustainable Development, Social Stability, Rural Women, Rural Areas, Iran.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term social stability as one of the three dimensions of sustainable development began to receive attention since the early years of the 21st century with the aim of improving living conditions in the society (Nastaran et al. 2013). In rural areas, the purpose of social stability is to help develop healthy living by providing the basic needs of the rural community by considering the quality of life consistent with the quality of the environment and based on economic systems in order to achieve the highest degree of life satisfaction (Pourtaheri et al. 2012). Discussion on social stability has currently gone beyond the issue of the population's abandonment of urban residences, and the subject of social stability now covers all dimensions of the social life and the needs of the rural community such as educational facilities, health and treatment services, appropriate accessibility to art and cultural facilities, and other facilities which are necessary in people's social life (Lyll&Tati, 2005). In general, achievement of social stability in rural areas by improving its components and indicators as well as the factors influencing it lays the foundation to develop the social capacities of rural residents and to enhance the ability of the rural community to make optimal use of natural, social and economic resources consistently with the objectives of sustainable development (Fatahi et al., 2013).

Women, as half of the population of the rural communities, are no exception of the above rule. Investigation of social stability and its indicators as well as investigation of factors influencing the social stability of rural women can, besides explaining the condition of their social stability, lay the foundation to gain enough knowledge for future programming in order to develop social stability and thereby economic and environmental stability in rural areas. Considering the above discussion, due to the importance of social stability in the development of rural communities, the present study attempts to investigate the condition of social stability and its main constituent indicators and to identify factors influencing social stability among rural women of Iran.

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II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social stability serves as a link among different dimensions of sustainable development (Colantano 2009:4) and is the ultimate objective of sustainable development. Economic and environmental developments are also of the objectives of sustainable development and are the means to achieve social stability (Assefa and Frostell, 2007). The main purpose of social stability is to provide the future generation with equal or greater accessibility to social resources than the current generation (Mak and Peacock, 2011). In 2000, the European Union in Lisbon initially defined social stability as an integral part of development models, and social stability received special attention (Samuelsson et al., 2004; Dixon et al., 2007).

Despite the discussions, the social dimension of sustainability has received scant attention in comparison with the economic and environmental dimensions (Woodcraft, 2012). McKenzie associates this fact with the difficulty of quantitative measurement of social stability. He believes the social stability dimension tends to concentrate on the qualitative characteristics of human societies. Therefore, quantitative measurement of economic and environmental dimensions of stability is easier and more feasible (McKenzie, 2004). In general, social stability means moving toward a condition where all people in the society are able to provide all their basic needs (achieving a rational level of tranquility, living a meaningful, purposeful and passionate life, having fair and equal accessibility to opportunities in health and education) (Salemi et al., 2011). In the process of rural sustainable development, social instability plays a pivotal role in the achievement of the objectives of rural development. Proof for this fact is that the emergence of instability in its environmental dimensions lies in mismanagement; and economic instability whose concrete representations are evident in inducing economic instability, inequality, poverty and unemployment in rural communities is due to the lack or neglect of social stability in rural areas. Hence, emphasis on social stability directs attentions to its role and position in the process of rural sustainable development more than ever (Pourtaheri et al., 2012).

However, social stability is a difficult concept to implement, and instability in human societies generally refers to stability along time. Therefore, this concept is not easy to measure (Jomehpoor et al., 2013). If social stability is to turn from a general description into an ultimate goal, it is necessary to define it in a clear, distinguishable, controllable and measurable way. Hence, it is essential to design social stability indicators. The main indicators for measuring social stability include population dynamism; empowerment; social cohesion and unity; health and social security; quality of employment and income; quality of education, services, housing, and environment; quality of information accessibility; community involvement; quality of institutional-national structures; optimism about the future; satisfaction with the place of living and place attachment; rates of crime and divorce; equality; compatibility; co-existence; social accountability; hope for the future; sense of happiness; extroversion and social interaction; social trust; fear of prevalence of social abnormalities; sense of deprivation; satisfaction with the performance of institutions; satisfaction with the quantity of service accessibility; satisfaction with the quality of service accessibility; place attachment; exhilaration in life; participation in cultural and recreational activities; participation in religious activities; participation in local activities; interpersonal trust; civil or institutional trust; and social justice (Salemi et al, 2011; Hartmut, 1999; Teimouri et al., 2012; Pourtaheri et al, 2012; Pourtaheri et al., 2010; Fatahi et al., 2013; Nastaran et al., 2013). In addition, the indicators of social stability also include social networks, the right to choose one's life and occupation, accessibility to equal opportunities, democracy, social innovations, concrete basic needs, mental basic needs, concrete social resources, mental social resources, equal concrete opportunities, equal mental opportunities, cultural variety, cultural heritage, and equal accessibility to welfare (Weingaertner&Moberg, 2011; Osmann&Spangenberg, 2002; Glasson and Wood, 2009; Bramley et al., 2006; Colantonio 2008b). Therefore, considering the various indicators of social stability, in order to measure it among rural women of Iran, the researchers chose 14 indicators, each containing various variables (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Constituent indicators of social stability

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a study entitled ‘Social Sustainability of Rural Women Assessing Sonqor County’, Salemi et al. (2011) concluded that the social condition of rural women of Sonqor County was not in a stable condition. The condition of the women of 6 out of 10 investigated towns was semi-stable and 2 towns were in instable conditions. The results of the study entitled ‘An Evaluation and Prioritization of Social Sustainability in Rural Areas: A Case Study of Villages in Khorrambid County of Fars Province’ conducted by Pourtaheri et al. (2012) demonstrated that the majority of investigated villages (9 out of 14) were in weak and inappropriate conditions in terms of social stability. The results of the study by Teimouri et al. (2012) aiming to investigate social stability in the neighborhoods of the city of Tehran showed that social stability in the 22 neighborhoods of Tehran Municipality is not in desirable conditions. Fatahi et al. (2013) investigated social stability in the villages of the town of North Khaveh of the city of Delfan. The results showed that social stability in the villages of North Khaveh is below average. Results of the study conducted by Meshkini et al. (2013) aiming to measure social stability in the 22 districts of the city of Tehran demonstrated that the study areas are at an average level in terms of social stability, such that 4 regions are at the stable level, 12 regions are at the average level and 6 regions are at the weak level.

In his article, Heyneman (1997) investigated education and social stability in Russia. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between social stability and level of education, such that increase in level of education leads to increase in social stability and decrease in level of education leads to decrease in social stability. The study by Cameron et al. (2007) entitled ‘Agricultural Change and Social Sustainability in Rural New Zealand’ demonstrated that agricultural changes in the last few year have exerted the greatest influence on social dynamism and hence on the concepts of social sustainability in rural areas of New Zealand. Manos et al. (2011) studied the impact of CAP policies on social sustainability in rural areas of northern Greece. They demonstrated that the aforementioned policies have led to social problems such as rural population aging caused by youths’ emigration, social problems for seasonal workers, and lower rate of employment for women. In a study entitled ‘Factors that Affect Social Stability of Rural Areas in Ganzi District of China’, Luo et al. (2011) concluded that, in general, the study area is in an appropriate condition in terms of

social stability. Their findings also revealed that factors affecting social stability in Ganzi District in Chia include economic factors, security measures, conflicts among villagers, religious conflicts among villagers, and justice.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is an applied piece of research adopting a descriptive-analytical method. The population comprises the rural women of villages accommodating more than 20 households. Considering time and money limitations, it was impossible to carry out a census and investigate all rural women in Iran. Therefore, using statistical procedures, 850 women were selected as the sample and were studied using multistage stratified random sampling in which the provinces of Iran constituted the strata. In the next step, 60 villages in these provinces were selected as the target villages. The main research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire comprising the two main parts of personal information of the participants and the information related to social stability indicators and components (123 components, 14 indicators in the five-point Likert scale)². Validity of the questionnaire was verified by expert judgment of university professors and social experts, and, in order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 30 questionnaires. Results of the investigation of reliability of the questionnaire determined by using Cronbach's Alpha are indicative of the appropriateness of the research instrument (Table 1). After data collection and processing using SPSS software, the data were analyzed and the subject under study was explained.

Table 1. Values of Cronbach's Alpha obtained for the 14 research indicators

Indicator	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Indicator	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Social accountability	6	0.802	Service accessibility quality satisfaction	11	0.867
Hope for future	8	0.823	Social trust	9	0.836
Sense of happiness	9	0.745	Social abnormalities	8	0.729
Extroversion and social interaction	8	0.879	Social cohesion	6	0.789
Community involvement	9	0.791	Social justice	10	0.845
Job satisfaction	9	0.752	Social dynamism	9	0.891
Place attachment	10	0.814	Satisfaction with trustee institutions	10	0.756

V. FINDINGS

Personal characteristics of the respondents

With regard to the personal characteristics of the participants, the results demonstrate that the mean age of the studied individuals was 36.5 years and their ages ranged between 16 and 69 years. With respect to the marital status of the participants, the results revealed that 74 percent of them were married, 19 percent were single, 3 percent were divorced and 4 percent were widowed. In addition, as regards their education level, the results demonstrated that 16 percent were illiterate, 15 percent had received elementary schooling, 17 percent had had high school and below-diploma education, 14 percent held a diploma, and 10 percent held an academic degree. Results also show that the means of the income of the heads of households, personal income (income from women's activities) and size of the household are 740 thousand tomans, 82 thousand tomans and 4.2 persons respectively. As for the employment condition of rural women, the results reveal that the majority of these women work in careers related to farming, animal husbandry, and handicraft and about 37 percent of them are members of secondary groups. Besides, most of these women have said that they have appropriate accessibility to communication services (e.g. roads, transportation vehicles, etc.). However, 89 percent have said that they have no access to the Internet. In addition, the results demonstrate that the size of farms belonging to the study households is 4.7 hectare on average and the average distance of the study villages from the nearest city is about 28 kilometers.

Investigation of the condition of rural women's social stability in terms of the 14 indicators of social stability

As revealed by the results (Table 2), among the 14 investigated indicators of social stability of the rural women in Iran, the indicators of social abnormality (reversed), social accountability and social dynamism with

²Very low (1), low (2), medium (3), high (4), and very high (5)

respective coefficients of variation of 0.233, 0.236, and 0.238 have had the greatest impact on the social stability of rural women. The results also reveal that the indicators of hope for the future, satisfaction with the quality of service accessibility, and job satisfaction with respective coefficients of variation of 0.414, 0.440, and 0.519 have had the lowest impact on the social stability of the women in the study area.

Table 2. Comparison of the condition of social stability indicators and investigation of the general level of social stability among rural women in Iran

Indicator	Mean Rank	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation	Rank
Social abnormalities	3.6	0.839	0.233	1
Social accountability	3.5	0.826	0.236	2
Social dynamism	3.7	0.881	0.238	3
Place attachment	3.5	0.549	0.242	4
Social cohesion	3.5	0.856	0.244	5
Social justice	3	0.791	0.236	6
Social trust	3.1	0.883	0.284	7
Extroversion and social interaction	3.1	0.897	0.289	8
Community involvement	2.6	0.893	0.343	9
Sense of happiness	2.9	1.09	0.351	10
Satisfaction with trustee institutions	2.6	0.994	0.382	11
Hope for future	2.7	1.12	0.414	12
Service accessibility quality satisfaction	2.7	1.19	0.440	13
Job satisfaction	2.1	1.09	0.519	14
Social stability	3	0.869	-	-

Investigation of the general level of social stability among rural women

With respect to the general condition of social stability among rural women in Iran, the results revealed that social stability is at low and very low levels among 23.5 percent of the rural women, at medium level among 51.7 percent of the rural women, and at high and very high levels among 24.8 percent of rural women. Therefore, considering the fact that social stability is at a medium level for the majority of the rural women, and, considering the mean of the calculated social stability resulting from the combination of the 14 factors (mean = 3) displayed in Table 2, it could be argued that social stability in the study area is at an average level.

Investigation of factors affecting social stability of rural women in Iran

In order to study the factors affecting social stability of rural women in Iran, first, the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable (social stability of rural women) was investigated using the related tests (Tables 3 and 4). As illustrated by Tables 3 and 4, of the 12 independent variables investigated, the variables of the income of head of household, personal income, farm ownership, Internet accessibility, cooperation with secondary groups, service accessibility, and occupation and level of education have a significance relationship to social stability of rural women in Iran.

Table 3. Relationship between social stability of rural women in Iran and the independent variable

First variable	Second variable	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Social stability	Age	0.1 ^{ns}	0.158
	Income of head of household	0.287**	0.000
	Personal income	0.384**	0.000
	Distance from town	0.022 ^{ns}	0.755
	Farm ownership	0.285**	0.001
	Internet accessibility	0.257**	0.000
	Cooperation with secondary groups	0.363**	0.000
	Service accessibility	0.157*	0.021

^{ns}insignificance; * significance at 0.05 level; ** significance at 0.01 level

Table 4. Relationship between social stability of rural women in Iran and the independent variable

First variable	Second variable	Kendall's tau correlation coefficient	Phi Landa correlation coefficient	Significance level
Social stability	Household size	0.098 ^{ns}	-	0.341
	Marital status	-	0.101 ^{ns}	0.212
	occupation	-	0.376**	0.000
	Level of education	-	0.309**	0.000

^{ns}insignificance; * significance at 0.05 level; ** significance at 0.01 level

- Investigation of the level of determination of factors affecting social stability of rural women in Iran

In order to elaborate the level of determination of factors affecting social stability of rural women, the stepwise regression procedure was employed. In this method, the variable which has the greatest impact on the dependent variable enters the model first, and other models are investigated again to enter the model. The results demonstrate that 5 variables simultaneously affect the amount of social stability of rural women. The multiple concordance correlation coefficient $R=0.820$ and the coefficient of determination $R^2=0.673$ show that the independent variables account for 67.3 percent of the variation of the dependent variable (Table 5). Therefore, the main independent variables affecting the amount of social stability of rural women could be ranked in priority order as follows: personal income, occupation, cooperation with secondary groups, level of education, and the income of head of household. Considering the results displayed in Table 5, the linear equation derived from regression analysis are written is follows:

$$Y = 0.743 + 0.353x_1 + 0.155x_2 + 0.133x_3 + 0.130x_4 + 0.122x_5$$

where Y stands for social stability of rural women, x1 for personal income, x2 for occupation, x3 for cooperation with secondary groups, x4 for level of education, and x5 for income of head of household.

Table 5: Results of multiple regression analysis

Variables	(B) coefficient	Beta	t-test	sig
constant	0.743	-	2.769	0.000
Personal income	0.347	0.353	5.976	0.000
occupation	0.179	0.155	2.891	0.004
Cooperation with secondary groups	0.131	0.133	2.351	0.02
Level of education	0.130	0.130	2.145	0.033
Income of head of household	0.128	0.122	2.084	0.038
	R²=0.673	R=0.820	Sig= 0.000	F= 33.651

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable development and its three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) constitute the main foundation of the current discussions. Social stability as the most important principle of sustainable development has greater significance than the two other factors since the ultimate goal of the two economic and environmental aspects is achievement of social stability and social welfare in human societies, and all human activities are one way or another directed toward achieving social stability in human societies in the current condition and in future. One of the paramount discussions relating to social stability is research on the level of social stability and factors affecting it among rural women as half of the assiduous and deprived rural population, which can play a significant role in enhancing their social stability. Thus, the objective of the present study was to investigate social stability and factors affecting it among the rural women in Iran.

The results demonstrated that among the 14 investigated indicators of social stability of rural women, the indicators of social abnormality, social accountability, social dynamism, place attachment and social cohesion had the greatest effect on social stability of rural women. The results also revealed that the indicators of service accessibility quality satisfaction and job satisfaction had the lowest effect on the social stability of the women of the study area. Main causes of the condition of social abnormalities among the rural women of Iran include lack or shortage of social problems such as crime and delinquency, theft, divorce, fashion-orientedness, family conflicts, drug and liquor abuse, etc. Also, the main causes of the inappropriate condition of indicators of service accessibility among rural women in Iran include poor accessibility to educational services (lack of middle schools in most villages and difficult study conditions for students, especially female students; lack of high schools in towns and difficulty of gaining access to such centers, especially in winter and particularly for

female students), few and insufficient activities of banks and credit institutions in rural centers and lack of easy access of rural women to banking facilities due to difficult and complex bank conditions and regulations for receiving facilities, lack of direct access of many rural areas to newspapers and publications, and lack of counseling centers even in towns which accommodate a great population of villagers. With respect to the indicator of job satisfaction, as the most instable indicator of social stability in the study area, it could be argued that lack of proportion of wages to the labor done, particularly in activities related to farming and handicraft, and consequently, low savings and investment; and low accessibility to permanent jobs (it should be noted that, due to the seasonal nature of farming activities, the majority of job opportunities in villages are not permanent) have a great impact on the inappropriate condition of this indicator. Besides, considering the difficulty of accessibility to job opportunities, the disagreement of the family members with women's working outside home, especially in urban centers, is another factor leading to low job satisfaction among the rural women of the study area.

Results of the investigation of the general condition of social stability among rural women of Iran reveal that the condition of social stability in the study area is at an average level. These results are consistent with those of the studies by Salemi et al. (2011), Pourtaheri et al. (2012) and Meshkini et al. (2013), which are all indicative of the average level of social stability in different areas. However, the results are inconsistent with the results of the studies conducted by Teimouri et al. (2012), Fatahi et al. (2013), and Luo et al. (2011) which are indicative of the appropriate or inappropriate level of social stability in different areas.

With respect to the variables affecting social stability of women in the study area, the results showed that the 8 variables of income of head of household, personal income, farm ownership, Internet accessibility, cooperation with secondary groups, service accessibility, and occupation and level of education are effective in the social stability of rural women. This result is consistent with the results of the studies carried out by Heyneman (1997), Camern et al. (2007), Manos et al. (2011), and Luo et al. (2011), all of which consider the above variables as effective in social stability.

In general, the results of multiple regressions revealed that the 5 independent variables of personal income, occupation, cooperation with secondary groups, level of education and income of head of household simultaneously affect the amount of social stability of the women of the study area and account for 0.673 percent of the dependent variable (social stability of rural women) in total. This is consistent with the results of the studies conducted by Heyneman (1997) and Luo et al. (2011). Generally, in order to reinforce social stability in the study area, considering the weaknesses identified, in each of the 14 indicators and in each of the components of these indicators, priority must be given to weak indicators and components (especially the indicators of job satisfaction and service accessibility) in future planning. Besides, paying attention to and providing the means of better access to variables of social stability, especially those with greater correlation with social stability (particularly personal income and occupation) will surely help enhance social stability among rural women.

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