Evaluation of Women’s Work Empowerment and its Role in Economic Development in Rural Areas  
(Case study: Kounani District of Kouhdasht County)

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Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION
One of the reasons that affects the underdevelopment is equal opportunities for women and men to develop empowerments. Women empowerment would have various advantages in different aspects for the development of rural communities. Rural women in Kounani District, like Third World communities in general and Iran’s rural areas in particular, are not exception to this rule. According to the situation of rural women in Kounani District, requirements for rural development in the scope of study include attempts to identify more accurate and to value employment and economic activity to resolve issues and remove barriers of employment and empowerments in the rural economy development.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
During recent decades a massive effort in the field of international development and empowerment of women has started. One of the goals is to promote gender equality and to empower women. Empowerment has interdisciplinary structure that rests heavily on psychological theories of society. For the first time in 1970, the concept of women empowerment was introduced in order to facilitate the struggle for social justice and equality for women through political transformation. However, during the 1990s, many organizations started to use the concept of empowerment in order to develop strategies for improving the status of women. Most of these strategies were based on the neo-economic development guideline.

3. METHODOLOGY
This study is an applied research with descriptive – analytic method. The location of the study area was Kounani District in Kouhdasht County which had two rural Districts: Zirtang (6444) and kounani (11603). This research was conducted in winter 2014. The population from which the participants were selected for this study consisted of 10895 women in rural area of Kounani District. According to Cochran formula and Morgan Table, 330 women were chosen for sample size. The reliability level of questionnaire was determined via Cronbach’s alpha and 0.79 was derived which indicated the fact that the internal consistency was high. The data for this study was collected through library research (note-taking and translation requirements), field study (questionnaire and interviews) and descriptive-analytic (mean, standard deviation, Friedman test, correlation and chi-square homogeneity) methods.

4. DISCUSSION
To answer the first research question, the Pearson correlation test was carried out. The test result showed that the most empowerment feature of Kounani women was related to agricultural jobs while the lowest features related to industrial vocations. This could be due to the agricultural development, particularly horticulture, in the area close to

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the Kounani District which has attracted women to work alongside men. The analysis of second research question revealed that increase in age, number of household members and income level would enhance the capability level of rural women in Kounani District. To answer the third research question which sought to find the relationship between women capabilities and their husbands' occupational groups, a Kruskal-Wallis test was used. The result showed that the women whose husbands were employed in agriculture have a higher capability level than other women. The reason could be linked to be the user of activities related to agriculture and to share activities among family members.

5. CONCLUSION
In general, the findings of the study substantiated the view that to recognize women capabilities accurately in various occupational fields and also to determine their potential and capabilities in empowerment of areas such as interest, self-confidence, literacy and proficiency, local and theoretical experience, responsibility acceptance, and motivation for improvement, on the one hand might lead to women’s unemployment decrease, but on the other, these features could increase women’s capability to perform various activities, improve the social and economic situations of their families and ultimately lead to rural development in various aspects.

Keywords: Women, occupational capabilities, empowerment, rural economic development, Kounani District.

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