Identifying Factors Affecting the Rural Women's Participation in Educational-extension Programs of the Jihad-Agriculture Service Centers (Case Study: Amol County)

Amir Ahmadpour*1, Mastaneh Alizadeh2, Hadi Moumeni helali3
1- Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension and Education, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran
2- MSc., in Agricultural Extension and Education, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran.
3- MSc., in Agricultural Extension and Education, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran.

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Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION
Rural women have significant roles in rural and agricultural activities, particularly in the field of agricultural production. Women are one of the effective groups in villages as they do 40% of the work in the area of agriculture and 90% of the work in the area of handicrafts. In most of the areas, the role of women is more noticeable and evident in the area of agriculture. In this case we can refer to the northern areas of Iran including Mazandaran province, due to its unique geographical and cultural position. Considering the important role of rural women in agricultural and rural activities in these areas, worthy attempts must be taken in order to improve their knowledge and skills. These attempts include improving their level of participation in educational-extension programs. In this regard, the present study aimed to investigate the factors affecting rural women's participation in educational-extension programs of the Jihad-Agriculture service centers in Amol township in order to be able to take positive steps in facilitating and accelerating the process of rural and agricultural development, as the result of the improvement in their level of participation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Participation is a condition in which, people participate in different programs, whether educational or administrative. Voluntarily, Knowingly, willingly, with consent and without any compulsion. Participation is important from different aspects; as in rural areas, it is counted as the most critical element in achieving the rural and agricultural objectives. In rural areas, women as the half of the population, have dominant roles in social and economic activities of the villages. In addition to the participation of rural women in agriculture and rural industries they have also had active and significant roles in rural service field from the past. In this regard, achieving sustainable agricultural and rural development requires greater attention to the needs of women in various aspects including education and skills. In this way, improvement of the background and promotion of women's participation level in the programs that have been provided to meet their needs, can pave the way for the rural development. These programs include the programs for women, offered and implemented by the Jihad-Agriculture service and extension center. Rural women's participation in educational-extension programs in this center, in addition to enhance their knowledge and skills in agriculture and rural areas, improves their awareness and knowledge in understanding the projects and assists them in implementing the rural development programs. It also has a significant impact on the optimal continuity of the implemented programs, the use and maintenance of their results and achievements.

3. METHODOLOGY
Due to the aims of the study, the present study is an applied research and descriptive-correlational in nature. To collect data, library research and field survey were used. The data collection instrument used in this study was a questionnaire, which reliability and validity were confirmed by the use of the Cronbach's alpha test ($\alpha > 0.78$) and the related experts' opinions. The research population consisted of 67,488 rural women in Amol township, Mazandaran province, Iran; from which, based on Cochran formula, 384 subjects ($n=384$) were selected using proportional stratified sampling. SPSS 16 software was also used for data analysis.

4. DISCUSSION
Based on the results of the study, the contribution of rural women in educational-extension programs is in a good and satisfactory level. Results of the correlation revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between the factors of age, educational level of the rural women, monthly income, the extent of the use of information sources, the extent of social characteristics, economic characteristics and the attitudes of the rural women on one hand and the level of their participation in educational-extension programs on the other hand. The regression analysis showed that the best predictors of the

* Corresponding Author: ahmadpour@iausari.ac.ir Tel: +989125505546
rural women's participation in educational-extension activities from among different factors are: economic characteristics, education level, income, attitude, age and the extent of the use of information sources, respectively, which in total, explain the 37.1% of rural women's participation in educational-extension activities. Based on the obtained results, more attention must be paid to the above mentioned issues and necessary decisions must be taken by the related planners and policy makers in order to improve rural women's participation in educational-extension programs.

5. CONCLUSION
In line with the results of this study, supporting economic and income-generating activities, specialized for rural women, such as setting up small businesses (in the form of self-employment plans) and facilitating women's participation in marketing activities and selling agricultural products, such as organizing local markets, encouraging women to become literate or to continue their education, planning and encouraging rural women, especially rural girls to participate in rural social and cultural activities to strengthen social relations, and to facilitate the exchange of information through personal relationships, to facilitate the access to mass media and information resources such as newspapers to strengthen the information and cultural background of the women in order to provide a setting for the process of their participation in the educational-extension programs, are of the suggestions of this study.

Keywords: Participation, educational-extension programs, rural women, Amol County.

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