

Socio-Economic Factors and Women's Empowerment: The Mediation Role of Training/Skill Development

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Abstract: - The Saudi Vision 2030 has a view that women's participation in the workforce not only helps to shift the prevailing attitudes and economic structures within a region but also significantly impacts the economic well-being of their families. Women can supplement their family's income by earning a wage, leading to an improved standard of living and better overall health outcomes. Therefore, this study tries to find the relationship between socio-economic factors and women's empowerment and investigate the mediating role of training/skill development between socio-economics factors and women's empowerment among Saudi women. This study collected the data with authentic and well-developed questionnaires from renowned areas of Saudi Arabia. The sample size for the analysis consisted of 327 participants and used Smart PLS for data analysis. The results of this study found that socio-economic factors have no significant direct impact on women's empowerment. In contrast, socio-economic factors positively impact training/skill development as well as training/skill development impacts women's empowerment. Therefore, training/skill development mediates the relationship between socio-economic factors and women's empowerment. This study found that the women participating are essential for the development of overall society. The study revealed the crucial role played by women in contributing to the household economy, as reflected by the income generated by them is comparable to that of male workers. This can be attributed to the significant drive exhibited by housewives to assist their husbands in easing the financial burden, along with the favorable opportunities presented by natural resources. The training/skill development program positively and significantly enhances the chances of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia.

Key-Words: - Socio-economic factors, training/skill development, women's empowerment, Smart PLS, Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia.

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1 Introduction

Women are an essential part of society and play important roles in all the fields of life, [1]. Unfortunately, in some societies, women are relegated to a secondary position, which is difficult to accept, [2]. Empowering women involves granting them authority in their daily lives, which is the key to their status and power. It can be said that empowering women means the authority to women for making their own decisions in life, [3]. Women's contributions to the workforce not only change the concept of society but her participation in the workforce makes the family financially strong, [4].

In modern times, the process of social development has changed family dynamics and there can be the emergence of single-parenting for women, [5].

Similarly, the significance of empowering and providing support to women has been acknowledged by the Saudi Arabian government. In 2016, King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud launched Saudi Vision 2030. The aim of this project is, to make Saudi Arabia a strong and prosperous nation, [6]. Although significant strides have been taken to enhance financial, WE (women empowerment) in the Saudi nation, because is a need for time to empower females to handle the

current challenges of modern life. This is particularly crucial since there has been a dearth of research on these issues in the past, [7].

There are a few studies, [8], [9], [10], [11], that explained the SEF (socio-economics factors) and WE in different countries and with different factors. These studies have some limitations as, [1], studied only WE and collected data from limited bank loan sachems. Research by, [8], related WE in the context of properties and limited the research to household food securities. Research by, [11], used 19 dimensions of WE and developed but this study did not explain the women's skills and training to make WE. In the framework of Saudi Arabia, there is a deficiency of research concerning the analysis of some important SEF of WE. In the literature of previous studies, there is a need to focus on some unrevealed aspects and implications for the theories already developed by the authors. Consequently, the purpose of this current research is to lessen the gaps generated by earlier studies; try to find out SEF's impact on WE, and investigate the mediating role of TSD (training/skill development relationship) between SEF and WE in Saudi Arabia. Further, this study also explained the existence of the critical consciousness theory, [12], for women's empowerment, which never has been used in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, this study is very significant for policymakers, society, and future research to see the importance of women's empowerment. Further, the research has contributed to expressing an operative and supportive approach to authorizing Saudi women to empower women economically. It has been shown to have positive effects on both the individual and society as a whole. Furthermore, by accumulating women's involvement in the labor market and increasing their self-dependence and capability, the study aims to make the most of their participation in supportable development in Saudi Arabia. The theoretical and practical implication of this study is to provide appreciated visions to decision-makers in both the public and private sectors. This research has great contribution to guiding policymakers in formulating policies and programs that promote women's economic empowerment. Further, the theoretical, justification, and empirical results of this study will not be limited to Saudi Arabia, it can provide a vision to different developing countries to give more attention to the progress of women.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Socio-economic Factors and Women's Empowerment

SEF plays an important role in empowering women. Whereas, WE denotes the procedure for empowering the female to make decisions in all aspects of life. The socio-economics factors have consisted of education, financial factors, decision-making power, self-esteem, self-confidence, etc., [11]. First of all, education is an important factor for WE, educated women tend to have better health outcomes, earn more, and have more control over their lives. Women's employment opportunities are essential for their economic empowerment and access to decent work and equal pay for equal work are critical factors for women's economic empowerment, [13]. Women also get empowered by the access to financial resources for their economic independence, access to credit, savings, and insurance can help women start their businesses and achieve financial stability, [14], [15]. Further, legal independence is also an element in WE. Women's legal rights, including their rights to own property, inherit, and divorce, are crucial for their empowerment, [16], [17]. Further, social norms and attitudes toward women can have a noteworthy influence on their empowerment. According to, [18], gender stereotypes and discrimination limit women's access to education and employment. So, the critical consciousness theory is developed on women's consciousness to save them from domestic violence and provide self-esteem as well as confidence, [19]. Therefore, this current study has developed the following hypothesis:

H1: SEF has a positive and significant relationship with WE.

2.2 Socio-economic Factors and Training/Skill Development

Socio-economic factors play a crucial role in determining the success of training and skill development programs. These programs are designed to improve the skills and abilities of individuals, particularly in the workforce, and enable them to participate fully in the economy, [20]. There are some ways in which socio-economic factors can impact the effectiveness of training and skill development programs such as education is a critical factor that affects individuals' ability to participate in training and skill development programs. Access to quality education and literacy levels can determine the need for training to get skills, [21], [22]. Employment opportunities can

also determine the success of training and skill development programs. Individuals may not be motivated to participate in training programs if there are no job opportunities available in their field. According to, [23], income plays an important role participation of a person in training programs. Furthermore, training facilities, transportation, and use of technologies have significant associations with programs related to skill development, [24], [25]. The conscious theory for women's empowerment also explains that skill development empowers women, [26]. Thus, this present study has established the subsequent hypothesis:

H2: SEF has a positive and significant relationship with TSD.

2.3 Training/Skill Development and Women's Empowerment

TSD are crucial for empowering women. These programs are established to arrange the setup of skills and knowledge for women to achieve financial independence and make their social and political position much better, [27]. TSD programs offer women the essential skills to arrive in the workforce, start their production, or advance their job scenarios, [28]. TSD programs also benefit women in developing management skills and political aspects, [29]. TSD programs build self-possession and self-confidence, which assist them in getting knowledge about their rights, decision-making skills, and tracking their goals, [30]. Training and skill development programs can also promote better health outcomes for women by providing education on health and hygiene, as well as access to healthcare resources, [31]. According to conscious theory, training, and skill development programs play an important part in providing skills to women and making them financially and socially strong, [32]. Consequently, this present study has settled the subsequent hypothesis:

H3: TSD has a positive and significant relationship with WE.

2.4 Mediating Role of Training/Skill Development between Socio-economic Factors and Women's Empowerment

Training and skill development are important factors to enable any person to earn and learn professional skills, [33]. In this study, training and skill development is used as a mediator. Empowerment is mostly known as an objective that is attained through education, [11], however, all knowledge is not used to measure empowerment; awareness and talent development are also exceptional tools to

measure empowerment. As the SEF is attributed to, WE and training and skill development enhance the possibilities of women's empowerment by increasing the skills among them. Training and skill development can play an important role in mediating the association between SEF and WE. Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds often have limited access to training and skill development programs, [34]. The skill development programs enhance the job opportunities and make the women independent. Training and skill development can also increase women's earning potential because, with higher earnings, women can have more control over their finances, which can lead to greater autonomy and decision-making power, [1]. Therefore, this present study has established the subsequent hypothesis:

H4: TSD mediates the relationship between SEF and WE.

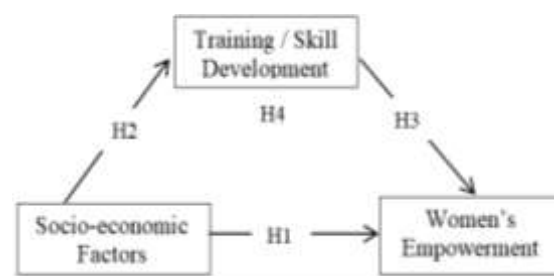


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 explains the conceptual framework of the study. This diagram explains that socio-economic factors have a direct and indirect relationship with WE. For the indirect relationship socio-economic factors impact training/skill development and then training and skill development help to enhance women's empowerment.

3 Methodology

The current study is cross-sectional and data is collected with the help of a convenient sampling method. This method is widely used in social sciences, [35]. According to, [36], this is the best method to collect the data even in a short time. For this current study, the targeted population was females living in Saudi Arabia. Data is collected with the help of a questionnaire and the validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a preliminary test. Moreover, 500 questionnaires were distributed from June to August 2021 among the participants and informed them about the nature of the study as well as the confidentiality of their personal

information. To increase the response rate, the questionnaires were translated from English to Arabic as well. 327 questionnaires out of 500 were received. So, the response rate was 65.4 which is favorable for data analysis.

Table 1 explains the characteristics of participants. It is noted that the response rate of the study sample in the Al-Jouf region is high (57.6%) compared to other regions covered by the study sample. Most of the age groups of female respondents are young (48.3%), and this is an indication of the opportunities that must be strengthened to benefit from development. The level of education of most of the respondents is a bachelor's (62.7%) and this is an advantage that enhances the benefit of women who are qualified and willing to enter the labor market. The percentage of women employed in the private sector represents the highest percentage (83.9%) compared to women who work for their account, and here it is necessary to consider empowering women in terms of enabling them to work more than a job, and this would achieve the vision in its comprehensive sense. It is shown in the table that the period for most women who are employed in the private sector or self-employed falls in the period (2017-2020), which is the period during which the vision became effective in reality, and this is one of the positive results of the vision 2030.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

| Variable | Scale | Percent (%) |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|
| Regions | Al-Jouf | 57.6% |
| | Hail | 13.6% |
| | Madina El Monawara | 6.8% |
| | Eastern | 12.7% |
| | Riyadh | 6.8% |
| | Mecca | 2.5% |
| | 20 to 30 | 48.3% |
| Age | 31 to 40 | 32.2% |
| | 41 to 50 | 19.5% |
| | Less than bachelor | 25.1% |
| Education level | Bachelor | 62.7% |
| | Master's degree or higher | 12.2% |
| | Private sector employees | 83.9% |
| Employment sector or private business ownership | I have a special activity | 16.1% |
| The date of employment in the sector or practicing the private economic activity | 2005-2008 | 10.2% |
| | 2009-2012 | 20.3% |
| | 2013-2016 | 26.3% |
| | 2017-2020 | 43.2% |

3.1 Measurement

3.1.1 Socio-economic Factors

SEF is measured with items developed by, [37], such as “the availability of nearby organizations has an impact on my ability to get a job or create my own business”, “the availability of transportation affects my ability to gain employment in organizations or my ability to be self-employed” etc.

3.1.2 Women's Empowerment

WE are measured with items developed by, [7], such as “self-esteem, self-efficiency, freedom of mobility, access to services, access to education, decision-making in daily life, economic empowerment, and gender-based violence” as a dimension of women empowerment.

3.1.3 Training/Skill Development

Training/skill development is measured with items developed by, [38], such as “training and skills development programs are useful in helping me in running my business”. etc.

3.2 Data Analysis

SmartPLS is applied for data analysis. Data analysis tools have become important in all the fields of management and science. The analysis has consisted of a test of the measurement model and structural model. First, this study conducted factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Moreover, the theoretical model was examined by testing the discriminant validity (DV) and correlation. Further, common method bias has been used such as coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (F^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). In the end, this study performed SEM on the data to test the proposed hypotheses.

4 Results

4.1 Measurement Model

After data collection, the current study measured the constructs' reliability with the help of factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), and composite reliability (CR) values. Table 2 explains the measurement model. A factor loading value greater than 0.5 is considered acceptable, and when it is equivalent to 0.7 or higher, it is also acceptable for a single indicator, as suggested by, [39], [40], [41]. The CA and CR acceptance values have a threshold level of 0.70, as determined by, [42]. So, the values of factor loadings, CA, and CR lie within the threshold. Consequently, the proposed model is

acceptable. Further, the average variance extracted (AVE) must be greater than 0.50. Table 2 explains that the AVE value is 0.542 to 0.886 which is more than the threshold level. For further analysis, discriminant validity is examined by the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The values in Table 3 indicate that variables have positive as well as significant correlations, [40].

4.2 Structural Model

The structural model for the test of the hypotheses is very crucial. This study used bootstrapping techniques for co-efficient path factor loading initiated by, [43]. This model extracted the values of coefficient determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and effect size (F^2) before analyzing the hypotheses. The F^2 value 0.02 indicates a small effect, 0.15 denotes medium while 0.35 explains a strong effect, [41]. The values for F^2 in Table 4 show that variables have a medium effect, R^2 values

greater than 0.10, and predictive relevance Q^2 is significant and higher than zero for the current research.

The structural model is tested through bootstrapping for 327 cases and 5000 resamples recommended by, [44], to examine the hypotheses. Table 4 shows the structural model. The results for H1 showed that there is no relationship between socio-economic factors and women's empowerment ($\beta = 0.024, p > 0.05$). Therefore, H1 was not supported. While the result revealed that the socio-economic factors positively affect training/skill development ($\beta = 0.363, p < 0.001$), training/skill development positively affects women's empowerment ($\beta = 0.392, p < 0.001$). Thus, H2 and H3 were supported. Similarly, socio-economic factors positively influence women's empowerment with training/skill development as a mediator ($\beta = 0.307, p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Measurement model

| Variables | Items | Loadings | Alpha | CR | AVE |
|----------------------------|-------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Socio-economic Factors | SEF1 | 0.892 | 0.907 | 0.932 | 0.734 |
| | SEF2 | 0.899 | | | |
| | SEF3 | 0.698 | | | |
| | SEF4 | 0.873 | | | |
| | SEF5 | 0.903 | | | |
| Women Empowerment | WE1 | 0.832 | 0.912 | 0.904 | 0.542 |
| | WE2 | 0.794 | | | |
| | WE3 | 0.811 | | | |
| | WE4 | 0.694 | | | |
| | WE5 | 0.672 | | | |
| | WE6 | 0.693 | | | |
| | WE7 | 0.692 | | | |
| | WE8 | 0.681 | | | |
| Training/Skill Development | TSD1 | 0.941 | 0.968 | 0.975 | 0.886 |
| | TSD2 | 0.953 | | | |
| | TSD3 | 0.935 | | | |
| | TSD4 | 0.932 | | | |
| | TSD5 | 0.945 | | | |

Note(s): AVE = Average Variance Extracted, CR = Composite Reliability, CA = Cronbach's Alpha

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

| | Socio-economic Factors | Training/Skill Development | Women Empowerment |
|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Socio-economic Factors | | | |
| Training/Skill Development | 0.384 | | |
| Women Empowerment | 0.212 | 0.671 | |

Table 4. Hypothesis constructs

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Std beta | Std error | T-value | P-value | Decision | R ² | Q ² | F ² |
|------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| H1 | SEF -> WE | 0.024 | 0.030 | 0.797 | 0.426 | No | 0.702 | 0.266 | 0.161 |
| H2 | SEF -> TSD | 0.363 | 0.064 | 5.652 | 0.001 | Yes | 0.132 | 0.115 | 0.152 |
| H3 | TSD -> WE | 0.392 | 0.055 | 7.174 | 0.001 | Yes | | | 0.212 |
| H4 | SEF-> TSD -> WE | 0.307 | 0.056 | 5.478 | 0.001 | Yes | | | |

5 Discussion

This study aims to develop and find out the socio-economic factors on women’s empowerment and to investigate the mediating role of training/skill development. Therefore, four hypotheses have been developed to see the relationship. The data analysis found that this study rejected the first hypothesis which explained there is no relationship between socio-economic factors and women empowerment in the context of Saudi Arabia. However, results indicate that socio-economic factors have an indirect as well as significant relationship with women's empowerment. This finding may be surprising for many researchers but, there may be some grounds that can be the cause of not acceptance of this hypothesis. The women of Saudi Arabia have self-confidence and easy access to technologies after the official announcement of Saudi Vision 2030 for this study, the data were collected from June to August 2021 after promoting social and cultural reforms, while the women can get more empowerment after the training and skill development, [22]. For example, [45], found in the study that there are some areas in the country where women have less empowered women than in other areas due to awareness or facilities. In other words, this study explained that in some countries may be no direct relationship between SEF on WE but after the skill and training women gain consciousness or awareness to attain their empowerment, [24].

Further, based on data analysis, it is found that SEF has a positive and significant impact on TSD, [21], [22]. In some of Saudi Arabia, women have a lack of self-esteem, self-confidence, the opportunity for decision-making and approach to infrastructure, training facilities impact the enrolment of women in skill development programs, [24], [25].

Further, this study accepted the hypothesis that explained that TSD has a positive relationship with WE. The training/skill developments enhance the hidden abilities of the women and provide women with the expertise and awareness required to contribute fully to the marketplace, attain economic liberation, and improve their social and political position, [27]. The establishment of skill development programs helps women start their

businesses, or increase their professional prospects, [28]. Women with proper training and skill development use to have the ability of self-confidence, self-esteem, and decision-making which makes them more powerful, [30].

Additionally, analysis reveals that training/skill development has a significant mediating role between socio-economic factors and women empowerment. Training and skill development a significant aspects to enable any individual to learn professional skills and earn, [33]. Mostly it is a perception that empowerment can be achieved with only education, [11], an essential element of socio-economics factor skills development that can be tools to measure women’s empowerment for their professional life. Women having low socio-economic backgrounds do not have access to skill programs, [34], but the provision of training and skill development helps them to increase their self-confidence, and decision-making opportunities and make them financially strong.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study is unique in many theoretical aspects. First, this study used socio-economic factors to investigate women's empowerment and the mediating role of training/skill development, such a combination of variables has never been used. Second, this study extracted unique results in which found no direct relationship between socio-economic factors and women empowerment but it has an indirect relationship with the help of a mediator (training/skill development). Further, this study used conscious theory for women's empowerment and this theory gives strength to the conceptual framework of the current study. Due to its uniqueness, the theoretical implication of this study is a great source of knowledge to policymakers, future researchers, and society.

5.2 Practical Implications

This study has strong practical implications in the private and public sectors as well as in society. This study has great contribution to the best implication and clarity in Vision 2030 for women’s empowerment. This current study emphasized that

women are a very important part of society, whereas socio-economic factors have a positive relationship with the contribution of women in social, economic, and political activities. These findings are correlated with Vision 2030, as this vision places more stress on gender equality, education, and skill development as well as economic empowerment. So, this study will make the project of Vision 2030 more powerful by providing awareness.

First, this study is vital to provide more efforts to raise the level of awareness of society about Vision 2030, its objectives, programs, and implementation deadlines, [46]. This study contributes to providing awareness to the female about their self-esteem and importance in the economics and financial activities in the world.

Second, this study explains the future benefits of women's empowerment in Vision 2030 for the economy and society. The implementation of results targets the citizens through modern technological means such as social media and through visual and print media, workshops, forums, and lectures.

Third, this study is very important and has the best contribution to encouraging and accelerating the activities of women in economic departments, which is one of the main pillars of sustainable development. This study supports women and enables them to invest their income and invest in the family, society, and the state by enacting supportive laws and legislations and granting them more economic and social freedoms through awareness programs and guidance directed at women and society.

Fourth, the current study encourages and prepares the female component to practice private work more than focusing on the job in a way that enhances its social status and working to remove all negative concepts about women practicing work in the private sector and encouraging women to start new small or medium projects that are economically feasible and facilitating their access to training and necessary financing, where women can take decisions and use their abilities. In other words, this study increases the sense of female entrepreneurship among women not only from Saudi Arabia but also from other developing countries.

This study also enables the society and administrative body to establish a special form for the empowerment of women to assume the role of professional training to qualify women and enable them to obtain the financing and support necessary to enter the labor market efficiently and with merit. Lastly, this study urges the government and well-fair authorities to establish specific training and development projects. These projects should aim to

make women more confident and provide awareness about financial independence.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

Women play an important part in social, economic, and domestic activities. They have their own identity and self-esteem. In Saudi Arabia, a plan named 2030 tries to enhance the condition of women by making them independent. So, the current study tried to unveil the relationship between SEF and WE, while training/skill development acts as a mediator between SEF and WE. This study collected data from 327 females and applied SmartsPLS tools to get empirical results. Further, the current study found that SEF does not have a relationship with WE, but TSD plays an important as well as significant mediating role between SEF and WE. The current study has novelty and importance for making a clear image of the WE. This paper insists the readers accept women's empowerment because women's contribution to economic activities can boost the performance of overall sectors. Women are more diligent and hardworking as well as more disciplined, whereas for the best performance TSD program plays a crucial role. Empowered women work hard, also give the best life to the family and less burden in the household.

This study also suggests that this conceptual framework should be used to check in different countries. Different countries have their own culture, ethics, and religious beliefs, whereas the repeating current research model in different countries can help to identify the findings across different countries. The major aim of suggesting this model is for various developing and developed countries to check the validity of the model and the SEF and women empowerment.

7 Limitations and Future Research

Women are making great contributions and with the advancement of time, women's participation in society has increased. Women's contribution to economics and business has great importance. Despite the great contribution of this study in explaining socio-economic factors related to women empowerment in the context of Saudi Arabia, this study has some limitations as this study selected some specific areas of Saudi Arabia, and being an Islamic country, it has different culture, resources abundances and working environment for the women. Therefore, the same model can be tested in

Western countries. Secondly, this study used training and skill development as the mediator; future studies can use technological innovation or the use of smart technologies as the mediator or moderator to bring novelty to the model. Thirdly, there are many theories for women's empowerment, but the current study used only one theory (The critical consciousness theory) and future studies can see (the capability approach, intersectionality, etc.) and implications in the context of Saudi Arabia.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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