

Research Paper

The effects of Social Capital Components on the Mental Health of Rural and Nomadic Women: A Case of the Members of Micro-credit Funds in Kerman Province

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the effects of social capital components on the mental health of rural and nomadic women that were the members of micro-credit funds in Kerman province. The study is a descriptive-correlational research conducted through a survey technique. The statistical population consisted of all the members of the micro-credit funds in Kerman province (N = 1146). As many as 300 members were selected as a sample using Krejcie and Morgan sample size table and the stratified random sampling method. The research tool was a questionnaire whose validity was confirmed by an academic panel of agricultural extension and education and mental health experts. Its reliability was confirmed by using a pilot test and calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ($0.72 \leq \alpha \leq 0.89$). The findings of the correlational analysis revealed that all the components including social trust, social interaction, social participation, social cohesion, exchange of information with social system, and informal relations positively and significantly correlate with the mental health of women. Furthermore, the results of the regression analysis demonstrated that the variables of social trust, social interaction, social cohesion, and exchange of information with social system have positive and significant impacts on mental health. These variables explained 61.9 percent of the variance of the mental health of rural and nomadic women.

Key words:

Social capital,
Mental health,
Rural and nomadic
women

Extended Abstract**1. Introduction**

Nowadays, the mental health of all community members is one of the most important concerns in national and rural development programs around the world. There is much evidence for the vulnerability of rural and nomadic women in terms of

mental health. Such women, as a segment of the society, are exposed to many stressful situations, such as economic deprivation, excessive fatigue due to multiple tasks, etc. Furthermore, studies have revealed that not only is mental health determined by behavioral, biological and genetical factor but also it has social determinants and/or predictors. Social capital is a crucial element which can play an important role in improving the mental health of community members. In this regard, the main purpose of this research is to analyze the effects of social capital compo-

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nents on the mental health of rural and nomadic women in Kerman province. Given that micro-credit funds are one of the well-known environments in which remarkable social capital is found, the present research was conducted among the members of these funds.

2. Methodology

This study is a descriptive-correlational research conducted through a cross-sectional survey. In addition, it is an applied study in terms of the research objective. The statistical population consisted of all the members of the micro-credit funds in Kerman province ($N = 1146$). As many as 300 members were selected as a sample using Krejcie and Morgan sample size table and the stratified random sampling method. The research tool was a questionnaire whose validity was confirmed by a panel of experts, and its reliability was confirmed by using a pilot test and calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ($0.72 \leq \alpha \leq 0.89$).

3. Results

The relationships among the study variables were measured through Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The results of the correlational analysis showed that all such components as social trust, social interaction, social participation, social cohesion, exchange of information with social system, and informal relations positively and significantly correlate with the mental health of women. Meanwhile, exchange of information with social system proved to have the highest correlation coefficient with mental health. The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that social capital components could predict 61.9% of the variance changes in the mental health of the micro-credit funds members. The results of the regression analysis demonstrated that the variables social trust, social interaction, social cohesion, and exchange of information with social system positively and significantly impact the mental health. However, the variables informal relations and social interactions were shown to have no significant standardized impacts on the dependent variables. A comparison of the standardized Beta coefficients also showed that the variables information exchange with social system ($\beta = 0.463$), social cohesion ($\beta = 0.399$), social participation ($\beta = 0.390$) and social trust ($\beta = 0.149$) have the highest power to predict mental health.

4. Discussion

Our analysis revealed that information exchange with social system, social cohesion, social participation and social trust are the most important components of social

capital in terms of predicting the mental health of rural and nomadic women. In this regard, the results suggested that it should be clarified to the members of micro-credit funds that working together is a common interest. It means that, while the members of micro-credit funds can have specific ethnic attachments and/or interests and think about role-playing in their informal networks, they can also have specific economic, social and civic communalities with the other members of these funds. Clarification of these communalities will first improve the social capital in micro-credit funds and then reinforce and increase the mental health of rural and nomadic women who are members of micro-credit funds in Kerman Province. In addition, the results obtained from the respondents' classification based on their mental health demonstrated that a majority of them have no favorable mental health standard. This result highlights the importance of this research and other studies which try to identify the predictors and determinants of mental health, especially in rural and nomadic women as members of micro-credit funds.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that reinforcing social capital can improve the standards of mental health among rural and nomadic women who are members of micro-credit funds. In this context, it should be noted that increasing information exchange among social system members is a milestone which can create an appropriate field to disseminate information of mental health among women. Developing social networks (i.e. another dimension of social capital which have a significant impact on mental health) of members is another option to improve mental health in rural and nomadic micro-credit funds. However, it should be kept in mind that developing a feeling of trust, participation and cohesion among micro-credit funds members is an effective mechanism that can sustain healthy behavioral norms and mental health.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest