




Sociological Analysis of the Comparison of Social Dimensions of Employment in Two Vulnerable Groups (Female Heads of Households and Individuals with Disabilities)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to conduct a sociological examination comparing the social dimensions of employment in two vulnerable groups: female heads of households and individuals with disabilities.

Methods and Materials: The present research is applied in terms of its objective and has been conducted using a quantitative survey method. Data were collected through a researcher-made questionnaire, which was utilized after confirming its validity and reliability. The statistical population included beneficiaries under the nationwide welfare organization, with a sample population consisting of 384 individuals with disabilities and 384 female heads of households under the welfare organization's coverage. Respondents were selected based on random sampling. Data analysis was performed using SPSS software.

Findings: The results from the Mann-Whitney U test indicated that overall, there is no significant difference between the employment of female heads of households and individuals with disabilities ($U = 68402.500$, $p = 0.083$) in terms of social dimensions. This means that, from a social perspective, the two groups face similar challenges. Additionally, examining the social components of employment revealed significant differences between the two groups in the components of role performance, social support, individual/social rights, and employment barriers. However, in terms of the job security component ($U = 70140.500$, $p = 0.238$), there is no significant difference between these two vulnerable groups. Both groups, individuals with disabilities and female heads of households, lack job security.

Conclusion: Attention to the social dimensions of employment for these two vulnerable groups by relevant organizations, especially in establishing job security for them, is essential and requires increased focus.

Keywords: *Employment; Social Dimensions; Female Heads of Households; Individuals with Disabilities*

1. Introduction

The family is the foundation and primary structure of any society and, as a social-emotional unit, serves as a place for growth, development, and change. Therefore, the influence of the family on psychological, emotional, and social balance cannot be overlooked (Ghezselflo et al., 2023). The most significant factor within the family that plays a crucial role is marital satisfaction among women (Navabinejad et al., 2024). Studies have shown that women's physical and mental health is not entirely dependent on the diversity of biological risks. The most important social and cultural factors, particularly those related to gender roles and power dynamics, are highly influential in this regard (Piryaei & Vareshadi, 2011; Rafatjah & Rabiei, 2016). Women generally have a higher adaptability to problems, but this comes at the cost of an increased risk of mental health issues such as depression, disconnection, mood swings, anxiety, and stress (Nargesikhoramabad et al., 2022; Osanlu Bakhtiari, 2016).

In many countries, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and dependency are among the major issues faced by the majority of individuals with disabilities, as they suffer from loneliness and social neglect daily. They experience significant harm (Zarrinkafshian, 2020). The primary needs of individuals with disabilities in Iran are in the areas of education, employment, and marriage. Additionally, individuals with physical disabilities participate less in society compared to other members of the community (Sadeghi Fasaei & Ghaeti Nia, 2014)8). According to statistics from the Welfare Organization, the number of disabled clients of this organization in 2021 reached 1,656,175 individuals, with approximately 15.23% of them employed. Given that employment plays a more significant role in the lives of individuals with disabilities, enabling them to feel pride and capability, and fostering a sense of independence (Zahiri Nia, 2011). Disability acts as a barrier to employment (McKinney & Swartz, 2021), and if not adequately addressed, it can lead to numerous social, cultural, and economic problems for the individual and society (Zeinali et al., 2018). The negative societal attitudes towards the employment and abilities of disabled individuals, as well as issues like the lack of specific employment laws for the disabled and fears of increased costs, are prevalent in all societies and are considered barriers to the employment of disabled individuals (Babik & Gardner, 2021). Addressing these issues could result in positive outcomes such as fostering a sense of independence

and hope for a dignified life, encouraging mobility and dynamism, utilizing one's innate talents, preventing despair and inactivity, meeting emotional and spiritual needs, avoiding involvement in socially unacceptable activities like begging and theft, being valued by family and society, and contributing to the job market and production in society (Bahri Khiavi & Abedini, 2018).

According to statistics from the Welfare Organization, the number of female heads of households under the organization's coverage in 2021 was 586,610, with approximately 28.77% of them employed. On the other hand, female heads of households also face the problem of unemployment. Given the importance and role of the head of the household in meeting the primary needs of household members on the one hand, and the existence of gender discrimination, legal and customary restrictions, and inequalities in most socio-economic fields for women, particularly female heads of households in most societies, including our own country, attention to the issues of female heads of households as one of the vulnerable groups in society becomes necessary. This necessity is especially evident from the perspective that examining the economic characteristics and activity status of female heads of households can impact the ability of the head of the household to meet the needs of its members. The increase in the number of female heads of households in the country indicates that their most significant problem is economic hardship and unemployment (Kordzangeneh & Vaghabeli, 2016).

Proponents of the theory of exclusion argue that social exclusion is a process through which certain social groups and individuals, such as female heads of households, are excluded and marginalized from society; consequently, they find it challenging to find opportunities to improve their conditions. Miller, in the context of social support, believes that the support received from friends and family in single-parent families has a direct effect on the quality of life. Based on previous studies and months of listening to the experiences of female heads of households, it can be said that the most significant consequence of the social interaction issues faced by female heads of households is the creation of an insecure space for them (Afrasiabi & Jahangiri, 2016). In the theory of empowerment, for any community, group, or individual experiencing systematic and institutionalized discrimination, empowerment is a suitable goal. Empowerment, meaning an individual's desire to take responsibility, was first officially interpreted as accountability. Zimmerman points out the ease and difficulty

of providing a definition for empowerment, asserting that it is easy to define when considered independently of terms like helplessness, powerlessness, and alienation, but it becomes quite challenging when we attempt to define it in relation to different individuals (Rezaei Tabar et al., 2012). Other studies show that heading a household increases women's independence and class awareness. In the field of sociology, female heads of households face issues and challenges such as lack of access to suitable employment, lower educational attainment among their children, increased delinquency, and multidimensional poverty (Khademi et al., 2023; Kordzangeneh & Vaghabeli, 2016; Momenzadeh, 2014; Nargesikhoramabad et al., 2022; Osanlu Bakhtiari, 2016; Parizad Tasrani & Hayatolghibi, 2021; Rafatjah & Rabiei, 2016). Consequently, they experience irreparable gaps in their kinship networks, relationships with relatives and acquaintances, and how they spend their leisure time. The most important indicator of class determination includes income, education, and occupation; that is, not all women are vulnerable, but those with lower income, lower education, and less prestigious jobs who belong to the lower class of society are vulnerable. In reality, the vulnerability of female heads of households and all impoverished individuals is a shared social and economic process that deprives them of access to suitable conditions (Osanlu Bakhtiari, 2016). This study attempts to examine the employment status of two vulnerable groups—female heads of households and individuals with disabilities—in Iran and to propose strategies for improving their employment situation. Therefore, the central question around which this discussion is shaped is: What is the sociological analysis comparing the social dimensions of employment for these two vulnerable groups (female heads of households and individuals with disabilities)?

2. Methods and Materials

The present study is applied in nature, utilizing a quantitative approach and conducted through a survey method. Data collection was performed using a researcher-

constructed questionnaire, which was administered after its validity and reliability were confirmed. This questionnaire consists of 22 items that compare the social dimensions of employment between two vulnerable groups: individuals with disabilities and female heads of households. The questionnaire was scored based on a Likert scale (with scores ranging from 5 to 1). The statistical population covered by the Welfare Organization in 2021 was 2,632,964 individuals, according to the national statistical yearbook. This included 586,610 female heads of households and 1,656,175 individuals with disabilities, who were included in the Cochran formula. The sample size was determined using Cochran's method, resulting in 384 individuals with disabilities and 384 female heads of households under the Welfare Organization's coverage, who were selected through random sampling.

The sampling method employed in this research was random sampling, with a selection of provinces from various regions of the country, including Tehran, Alborz, Gilan, Lorestan, Hormozgan, Hamedan, Qazvin, Kermanshah, Ardabil, and Shiraz. Face validity was used to validate the questionnaire; experts in the field reviewed the questionnaire and provided feedback on each question and its relevance to the research objectives. Ultimately, the questionnaire was approved with minor revisions. To measure reliability, Cronbach's alpha method, one of the most important and commonly used methods, was employed. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained using SPSS software was 0.903 for the questionnaire on female heads of households and 0.782 for the questionnaire on individuals with disabilities. This indicates that the questions related to the employment of individuals with disabilities and female heads of households have relatively good reliability and can be utilized.

In previous studies, the components of social dimensions, including social support, role, individual/social rights, employment barriers, and job security, were analyzed using data derived from the questionnaires and weighted using the Shannon entropy method.

Table 1

Weighting of Social Dimension Components

Dimensions	Components	Total Score	Mean	Mean Rank	Information Load Index	Shannon Weight	Weight Rank
Social Dimensions	Role	88	3.403	2.826	0.983	0.05599	0.05548
	Social Support	237	3.044		0.982	0.05593	
	Individual/Social Rights	150	2.884		0.978	0.05571	
	Employment Barriers	128	2.471		0.965	0.05497	
	Job Security	151	2.330		0.962	0.05479	

After reviewing relevant domestic and international articles and books, the necessary data were collected using questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to organize, summarize, and categorize the raw data obtained from the survey method, leading to conclusions and inferences from the collected information.

To test the hypotheses, samples were randomly selected from individuals with disabilities and female heads of households under the Welfare Organization's coverage. The demographic characteristics of this research include individual and demographic factors such as age, marital status, education level, type of job, workplace, and employment status. The research variables, including the components of social dimensions of employment, were administered to female heads of households and individuals with disabilities in the form of a questionnaire. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test was used to assess the normality of the data distribution. In the descriptive statistics section, frequency, percentage frequency, mean, charts, and tables were drawn, and in the inferential statistics section, due to the non-normality of the data, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the employment dimensions and components between the two independent groups: female heads of households and individuals with disabilities. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software version 22 with a significance level. Additionally, charts were drawn using Excel software. The research data were entered into SPSS software and then analyzed at both descriptive and inferential levels.

3. Findings and Results

This section presents a descriptive analysis of the demographic information related to the respondents, as well as the descriptive data for the questionnaire variables, including role, social support, individual/social rights, social barriers, and job security.

Among the respondents, the majority of individuals with disabilities, 248 (64.6%), were single, and 229 (59.6%) of the female heads of households were also single. Therefore, the number of single individuals in both groups is higher

than that of married individuals. A total of 214 respondents (55.7%) from the group of individuals with disabilities worked outside the home, and similarly, 233 respondents (60.7%) of the female heads of households worked outside the home. Both groups had a higher number of individuals employed outside the home. Most of the individuals with disabilities participating in this study, 251 (65.4%), had part-time employment, and similarly, 244 (63.5%) of the female heads of households also had part-time employment. Employment in both vulnerable groups was predominantly part-time. The largest age group among the disabled participants was 25-34 years, with 133 individuals (34.6%), and the largest age group among female heads of households was 35-44 years, with 136 individuals (35.4%). This indicates that the working disabled population is younger. The majority of disabled participants had a bachelor's degree, 113 individuals (29.3%), while the majority of female heads of households had an education level of secondary school, with 105 individuals (27.3%). In other words, the working disabled individuals had a higher level of education.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the variables of female heads of households and individuals with disabilities yielded a significance level (Sig) smaller than 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) claiming the normality of the data distribution is rejected. As a result, the variables of employment for female heads of households and individuals with disabilities do not follow a normal distribution, necessitating the use of non-parametric tests.

In Table 2, the mean ranks for the female heads of households group were 370.63, and for the group of individuals with disabilities, 398.37. This shows a difference in the mean of social dimensions between the two groups. However, considering that the significance level (Sig = 0.083) is greater than 0.05, this difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the hypothesis of the study, stating that there is a significant difference in the social dimensions of employment between female heads of households and individuals with disabilities, is not supported.

Table 2

Comparison of Means and Significance Levels of Social Dimensions in Two Groups: Female Heads of Households and Individuals with Disabilities

Social Dimension Variables	Mean (Female Heads of Households)	Mean (Individuals with Disabilities)	U	z	p-Value
Role	408.43	360.57	64537.500	-3.055	0.002
Social Support	346.35	422.65	59178.000	-4.839	0.000

Individual/Social Rights	340.54	428.46	56849.000	-5.559	0.000
Employment Barriers	427.56	341.44	57193.000	-5.448	0.000
Job Security	375.16	393.84	70140.500	-1.180	0.238
Social Dimension	370.63	398.37	68402.500	-1.735	0.083

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Regarding the employment of female heads of households, it is clear that their challenges are undoubtedly social issues that cannot be easily overlooked. Although the norms of Iranian society and our religious traditions do not strongly oppose women's employment outside the home, in our society, men are typically the breadwinners while women manage household chores. This societal structure makes it even more challenging for housewives who are also the primary breadwinners. Studies indicate a concerning economic and livelihood situation for female heads of households in the country. Additionally, individuals with physical disabilities have less social interaction and a greater tendency towards social isolation compared to non-disabled individuals. Moreover, individuals with physical-motor disabilities face unfavorable conditions in terms of access to their human and social rights compared to others. Most physically disabled individuals are unemployed, lack suitable jobs, are socially isolated, or are stigmatized and deprived, and they face various physical, legal, economic, and psychosocial barriers in both employment and non-employment settings (Moshtagh et al., 2011). Discrimination has its consequences. The first and most important consequence of discrimination against individuals with disabilities is their disempowerment. The emphasis and exaggeration by society, family, school, university, and work environments on the limitations of these individuals deprive them of opportunities to develop their potential talents (Mohseni Tabrizi & Jabali, 2013). This research aims to conduct a sociological analysis comparing the social dimensions of employment for two vulnerable groups: female heads of households and individuals with disabilities.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test indicate that there is no significant difference in the social dimensions of employment between female heads of households and individuals with disabilities ($U = 68402.500$, $p = 0.083 > 0.05$). Therefore, the research hypothesis is rejected. The analysis of mean ranks reveals that female heads of households, with a mean rank of 370.63, and individuals with disabilities, with a mean rank of 398.37, face similar social challenges.

Regarding the components of the social dimension, after conducting the Mann-Whitney U test and observing the

results, it was found that the mean rank difference in the components of role, social support, individual/social rights, and employment barriers between female heads of households and individuals with disabilities is statistically significant ($\text{Sig} < 0.05$). However, the mean rank difference in the job security component is not statistically significant ($\text{Sig} > 0.05$). Both groups, individuals with disabilities and female heads of households, lack job security.

A significant difference was observed in the role component between the two groups. Female heads of households put more effort into coordinating their role as mothers with their employment, while working individuals with disabilities strive to assume other roles within the family and society. The results of this study regarding the employment of female heads of households align with the findings of Rafatjah and Rabiei (2016). They noted that the mere quantity of roles does not create pressure and conflict but rather an individual's ability to manage and the support received from family and acquaintances are crucial in shaping the perception of existing pressures (Rafatjah & Rabiei, 2016). Thus, the impact of problems and stress-inducing factors on female heads of households depends on their level of control over matters, coping skills, and social support.

A significant difference was also observed in the social support component between the two groups. The results show that individuals with disabilities report higher satisfaction with social support compared to female heads of households. The explanation for this finding may be that most female heads of households who are supported by welfare organizations face not only economic challenges but also negative social pressures, such as stigmatization towards widowed and divorced women. From the moment they lose their spouses for any reason, these women are forced to take on multiple conflicting roles. The lack of social support and negative attitudes create stress, fatigue, and feelings of inadequacy among these women. Due to their lack of familiarity with social laws and regulations and the absence of job skills, they are often drawn into service jobs with no job security or social protection.

Additionally, a significant difference was observed in the individual/social rights component between the two groups. Individuals with disabilities are more aware of their individual and social rights compared to female heads of

households. This can be attributed to the higher level of education among the disabled respondents, as found in this study. Therefore, it can be concluded that they are more knowledgeable about their individual/social rights in society. Bahri Khiavi and Abedini (2018) also believe that although collective efforts are necessary to secure the rights of individuals with disabilities in employment, it ultimately requires the efforts of the disabled themselves (Bahri Khiavi & Abedini, 2018). Through familiarity with and advocacy for their rights, as well as the use of special organizations for the disabled and other domestic and international media and human rights organizations, individuals with disabilities can attain their maximum right to employment and other rights. They can also educate society about their challenges and promote a culture of respect for the rights of individuals with disabilities, enabling them to be fully integrated and active in all areas of society like other individuals.

Another significant finding of this study is the difference in the employment barriers component between the two groups. Female heads of households face more employment barriers compared to individuals with disabilities. The results of this research are consistent with the findings of the study by Movahedi and Pouya (2022). They found that female heads of households face multiple barriers to expanding their businesses, including cognitive-family barriers, cultural barriers, financial-support barriers, educational barriers, and marketing barriers (Movahedi & Pouya, 2022).

Although there is no significant difference in the job security component between female heads of households and individuals with disabilities, this component has the highest frequency in both target groups. Barghi et al. (2013) also believe that job stress among employees with physical-motor disabilities is higher compared to non-disabled employees, and the factors related to it differ (Barghi et al., 2013). Given that both groups lack job security, considering the definition of job security as the perception of having a suitable job and the assurance of its continuity in the future without threats to favorable working conditions (Alvani, 2023; Alvani et al., 2007), it can be concluded that although job security is a concept related to personal perception, it seems reasonable that a crisis in the workplace, necessitating adjustments and changes in the workforce, would lead individuals to feel insecure about their jobs (Silva et al., 2023). The absence of job security disrupts the expected balance between employees and management, leading to negative outcomes. Therefore, it can be concluded that perceived job security reflects how individuals in an

organization view their positions and how much they are inclined to maintain their current positions at work (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010). Moreover, people tend to avoid stressful situations, and the lack of job security, as a significant stressor, becomes a reason for leaving a job.

If an individual believes they have a suitable job and are confident that they will continue to work in that job until the end of their service period without being threatened by anyone or anything for performing their roles and duties, they have job security. In other words, job security is the result of an individual's assessment of personal, organizational, and environmental conditions, leading them to conclude that no particular factor threatens their job security and that they can confidently continue their employment (Alvani, 2023). When a set of criteria is consistently applied, unbiased, based on accurate information, revisable, ethical, and representative of the interests of all individuals, people are more likely to accept the basis of organizational decisions at their workplace, even when they disagree with them (Latham, 2007, translated by Arshadi, 2010). When individuals with disabilities or female heads of households believe that fair practices are in place at their workplace, they are more inclined to trust their managers and accept their decisions, even if they do not agree with them. Overall, when individuals in the workplace experience fairness and job security, they are not only able to set aside their personal interests but are also willing to sacrifice their personal desires to achieve the organization's significant and prominent goals due to the trust they have developed in senior management (June, 2009). Overall, attention to the social dimensions of employment for these two vulnerable groups, particularly in establishing job security, is crucial, and relevant organizations need to pay greater attention to these issues.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted within a specific cultural and socio-economic context in Iran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or countries with different social norms and economic conditions. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study restricts the ability to infer causality between the variables examined. The sample size, although statistically adequate, may not fully capture the diversity

within the populations of female heads of households and individuals with disabilities.

Future research could address these limitations by conducting similar studies in different cultural and socio-economic contexts to compare the findings across regions or countries. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to establish causal relationships and examine changes over time in the social dimensions of employment for these vulnerable groups. Additionally, qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of female heads of households and individuals with disabilities, particularly in understanding the nuances of their social support systems and employment challenges. Expanding the sample size and including more diverse subgroups within these populations could also enhance the comprehensiveness of future studies.

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and organizations involved in supporting vulnerable populations, such as female heads of households and individuals with disabilities. There is a need for targeted interventions to improve job security and social support for these groups, which could be achieved through the development of inclusive employment policies and the enhancement of social welfare programs. Organizations should also focus on providing accessible education and training opportunities to empower these individuals, enabling them to better navigate employment barriers and assert their individual and social rights. Additionally, fostering a more supportive social environment through public awareness campaigns could reduce stigma and discrimination, ultimately leading to more equitable employment outcomes for these vulnerable populations.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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