

Identifying Individual, Family, and Social Factors Contributing to Psychological Empowerment Among Women

Anouk. Vermeulen¹, Ágnes. Tóth^{2*}, Thomas. Declerck³

¹ Department of Developmental Psychology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands

² Department of Clinical Psychology, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

³ Department of Social Psychology, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

* Corresponding author email address: agnes.toth@ppk.elte.hu

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Vermeulen, A., Tóth, Á., & Declerck, T. (2026). Identifying Individual, Family, and Social Factors Contributing to Psychological Empowerment Among Women. *Psychology of Woman Journal*, 7(4), 1-20.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.pwj.6207>



© 2026 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify and explain the individual, family, and social factors contributing to psychological empowerment among women in Hungary.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study was conducted using conventional qualitative content analysis. The participants were 24 adult women residing in Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged, and Pécs, Hungary, who were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation in age, education, employment status, marital status, family structure, and socioeconomic background. Data were collected through individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45–70 minutes. Interviews explored participants' experiences of psychological empowerment and the personal, relational, and social conditions that strengthened or restricted their autonomy, competence, self-confidence, and perceived control. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently until theoretical saturation was achieved. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed inductively through identification of meaning units, initial coding, constant comparison, categorization, and development of overarching dimensions. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were strengthened through iterative analysis, member checking, peer discussion, reflexive documentation, and maintenance of an audit trail.

Findings: Analysis generated 683 initial codes, which were organized into 27 subcategories, nine major categories, and three overarching dimensions. Individual factors included self-awareness and self-acceptance, perceived competence and self-efficacy, psychological resilience and adaptive coping, and autonomy and purposeful agency. Family factors comprised emotional security and supportive relationships, equitable family interaction and decision-making, and family encouragement for personal development. Social factors included access to socioeconomic opportunities and supportive social participation and recognition.

Conclusion: Psychological empowerment among women is a multidimensional and dynamic process arising from the interaction of personal capacities, supportive family relationships, and enabling social conditions; therefore, sustainable empowerment requires interventions that simultaneously strengthen individual agency, relational support, and access to meaningful social and economic opportunities.

Keywords: *Psychological Empowerment; Women; Self-Efficacy; Autonomy; Family Support; Social Participation; Socioeconomic Opportunities.*

1. Introduction

Women's empowerment has become an increasingly important concept across psychology, sociology, public health, development studies, family studies, and gender research because it reflects women's capacity to exercise meaningful control over their lives, participate in decisions, mobilize personal and social resources, and pursue valued goals. Contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes empowerment as a multidimensional process rather than a single outcome, emphasizing that economic resources, social participation, decision-making authority, family relationships, individual agency, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being interact in shaping women's lived experiences of power and autonomy (Desai et al., 2022; Singh & Singh, 2025). This broader perspective is particularly important because structural opportunities do not automatically translate into subjective empowerment, while psychological confidence alone may be insufficient when women encounter restrictive family environments, limited access to resources, discrimination, or persistent gendered expectations. Accordingly, understanding psychological empowerment requires attention to the interaction between internal capacities and the relational and social contexts within which women make choices and act upon them.

Psychological empowerment refers to a subjective sense of competence, autonomy, agency, meaning, self-confidence, and perceived control over important dimensions of life. It concerns not only whether women formally possess rights or resources but also whether they perceive themselves as capable of making decisions, expressing preferences, influencing circumstances, and pursuing personally meaningful goals. Research has repeatedly shown that autonomy and agency are central components of women's well-being, although their expression is shaped by cultural expectations and social relationships (Kumar et al., 2024). Similarly, studies examining women's decision-making and gender attitudes suggest that access to material resources alone does not necessarily produce empowerment unless women can translate such resources into actual influence over household and personal decisions (Kinati et al., 2022). This distinction between possessing resources and being psychologically able to use them highlights the importance of studying empowerment as a process involving both subjective and objective conditions.

A growing body of research has emphasized that psychological empowerment is strongly connected to self-efficacy, perceived agency, and autonomy. Self-efficacy contributes to empowerment by strengthening women's confidence that they can cope with difficulties, make effective decisions, and achieve desired outcomes. In a multidimensional examination of women's empowerment, self-efficacy was shown to function as an important psychological mechanism linking broader empowerment-related resources to women's perceived capabilities (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022). Physical and behavioral domains also demonstrate this relationship. Research on women's exercise experiences has shown that psychological empowerment may be associated with agency, autonomy, physical self-efficacy, and reduced internalization of constraining stereotypes (Mosanya & Kassie, 2024). Such findings indicate that women's psychological empowerment is partly rooted in how they interpret their own capacities and whether they believe that their actions can produce meaningful consequences.

Self-awareness and self-esteem also play critical roles in this process. Women's ability to identify their needs, values, strengths, and boundaries may strengthen autonomous decision-making, whereas persistent self-doubt can make external opportunities difficult to use effectively. Recent research has demonstrated that empowerment-related resources such as education and autonomy can interact in complex ways with earlier family experiences, including harsh parenting, to influence women's self-esteem (Zhao, 2026). This finding is particularly important because it suggests that empowerment cannot be understood as a simple accumulation of advantages. Women may acquire education, income, or greater freedom of choice while still carrying psychological effects of earlier family experiences that shape self-worth and confidence. Likewise, life satisfaction among women appears to be closely connected to their sense of meaning, relational security, autonomy, and ability to interpret their life experiences positively (Abbasi, 2026). These findings support the view that psychological empowerment should be studied as a dynamic developmental process rather than as a static personal trait.

Individual psychological resources are also especially important when women face adversity, discrimination, or violence. Gender-based violence can profoundly affect mental health, perceived control, self-worth, and social functioning, making psychological and psychosocial support particularly important for restoring agency and safety (Antony, 2026). Research on intimate partner violence

among economically disadvantaged women with disabilities further demonstrates how poverty, disability, relational power imbalance, and violence may interact to restrict autonomy and psychological well-being (Abdelwahed et al., 2025). Similarly, analyses of gender relations and intimate partner violence have shown that power and agency are closely connected to women's mental health, indicating that limited control within intimate relationships can have significant psychological consequences (Navarro-Mantas et al., 2022). Thus, empowerment is not merely associated with positive functioning; it may also serve as a protective and restorative process when women are exposed to relational and structural vulnerabilities.

At the family level, emotional support, respect for autonomy, shared decision-making, and equitable interpersonal relationships appear to be fundamental conditions of empowerment. Family environments can reinforce women's confidence and independence by providing emotional security, practical assistance, encouragement, and validation of their choices. Conversely, family control, unequal role expectations, and exclusion from decision-making may inhibit agency even when women have educational or occupational resources. Research examining household decision-making has demonstrated that women's involvement in family decisions is associated with broader socioeconomic and reproductive behaviors, underscoring the importance of decision-making power as a relational dimension of empowerment (Mbah et al., 2023). In maternal health contexts, women's autonomy has likewise been shown to influence health-related decision-making and the ability to navigate service systems (Olwanda et al., 2023, 2024). These findings illustrate how family-level empowerment can produce practical consequences extending beyond subjective confidence into health, resource use, and everyday life management.

Family relationships may be especially consequential during transitions involving marriage, motherhood, employment, or changing gender roles. Research among early-married women has shown that perceived agency is closely intertwined with marital quality and women's ability to negotiate their position within intimate relationships (Yunizar & Xiong, 2025). Married women's psychological well-being may also be shaped by multiple relational and social pressures, as indicated by research on anxiety and its predictors in married women (Tohan et al., 2025). At the same time, changing family structures and alternative life pathways may create both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Research on single women has demonstrated that support

systems, social expectations, and intersectional conditions shape how women interpret independence and belonging outside conventional marital arrangements (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of examining empowerment across diverse family experiences rather than assuming that a single family form produces either empowerment or restriction.

The family context also interacts with digital and educational environments. Maternal engagement with digital technologies and social media can influence women's participation in decisions regarding children's educational expenditures, suggesting that access to information and communication may increase household influence in certain contexts (Vijayalakshmi & Lin, 2022). More generally, family support can function as a bridge between individual capability and broader participation by enabling women to pursue education, employment, entrepreneurship, or community engagement. The role of strong social and relational ties is particularly important in collectivist environments, where close interpersonal relationships may provide access to resources, legitimacy, information, and emotional support (Bastian et al., 2023). However, strong ties may also reproduce restrictive expectations when family or community norms prioritize conformity over individual choice. Consequently, the quality of relational support appears to matter more than the mere presence of close relationships.

Social and economic conditions form another major domain of women's empowerment. Financial independence is often regarded as a critical resource because it can reduce dependency, strengthen bargaining power, and expand women's capacity to make choices. Recent research has emphasized the relationship between financial independence and relational empowerment, demonstrating that economic resources can alter power dynamics within close relationships and increase women's negotiating capacity (Hosanoo et al., 2026). Yet economic participation does not necessarily produce comprehensive empowerment. Studies of female day laborers, for example, indicate that women may participate actively in income-generating work while still experiencing limited social recognition, insecurity, and restricted decision-making power (Sony & Rifat, 2024). Similarly, microfinance may increase access to resources without independently producing full empowerment unless accompanied by changes in social relations, confidence, and decision-making authority (Pervin et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurship and collective economic participation provide additional examples of how social resources and

psychological processes interact. Research among rural women has demonstrated that entrepreneurial activity, microfinance, and social capital may jointly contribute to women's empowerment by increasing economic participation and strengthening networks of support (Andriani et al., 2022). Multi-actor engagement involving communities, institutions, networks, and support organizations may further facilitate women's entrepreneurship and enhance their ability to transform economic participation into meaningful empowerment (Venugopalan et al., 2021). Participation in self-help groups has likewise been associated with psychological empowerment, suggesting that collective structures can strengthen confidence, solidarity, knowledge exchange, and perceived agency (Mahato & Jha, 2024). Taken together, these studies indicate that economic resources are most empowering when they are embedded within supportive social and institutional environments.

Employment and organizational participation also influence psychological empowerment through recognition, professional identity, opportunities for advancement, and access to decision-making. In service and tourism contexts, women's participation has been associated with psychological empowerment, although cultural collectivism and social expectations may shape the extent to which participation translates into autonomy and perceived influence (Hassan et al., 2024). Research on women's empowerment in management further highlights the importance of organizational structures, leadership opportunities, and critical attention to historical and cultural barriers that limit women's advancement (Samier & ElKaleh, 2021). More recent scholarship has emphasized the need to make women's experiences more visible within organizational research and to recognize intellectual and professional activism as pathways for challenging exclusionary systems (Bosch et al., 2025). Therefore, psychological empowerment in occupational contexts depends not only on having employment but also on whether women experience respect, voice, recognition, and opportunities to influence their professional environments.

Beyond work and income, social participation and community belonging are important sources of empowerment. Women's networks, community groups, peer support, and collective action can reduce isolation and provide opportunities for mutual learning, social recognition, and resource exchange. Such processes may be particularly influential where women face restrictive gender norms or limited institutional access. Studies in rural and

coastal communities have shown that women's empowerment is closely connected to livelihood conditions, household roles, social participation, and decision-making opportunities (Rahman et al., 2024; Sarker et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that empowerment is embedded in broader systems of material security and community life. When women have greater control over productive resources and household decisions, empowerment may also contribute to wider family outcomes, including food security and household welfare (Sarker et al., 2024).

The relationship between empowerment and reproductive behavior further demonstrates its multidimensional significance. Women's ability to participate in fertility decisions is strongly influenced by education, household power, socioeconomic conditions, and gender norms. Recent evidence from Bangladesh highlights the complex connection between empowerment and fertility, suggesting that empowerment affects reproductive decisions through multiple pathways rather than through a single mechanism (Chowdhury & Haque, 2025). At the same time, the development of multidimensional empowerment indices reflects increasing recognition that women's empowerment must be assessed across several domains, including economic participation, decision-making, mobility, attitudes, and access to resources (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Such measurement efforts are valuable, but they may not fully capture the subjective meanings women attach to empowerment or the psychological mechanisms through which structural conditions become personally empowering.

Cultural norms also shape whether women perceive certain forms of autonomy as legitimate or attainable. Gender expectations influence family roles, employment, public participation, mobility, and social identity. Research involving refugee women has demonstrated that displacement and changing social environments may reshape gender norms, sometimes creating new opportunities for autonomy while simultaneously generating new vulnerabilities (Alhalawani & Al-Serhan, 2024). This illustrates the fluidity of empowerment across changing contexts. Women may experience increased responsibility and decision-making authority under altered social conditions, but such changes do not always produce corresponding psychological security. In this sense, empowerment may involve both gains and tensions as women negotiate between traditional expectations, emerging opportunities, and personal aspirations.

The interaction between personal agency and social structure is also evident in contexts where women's choices

are constrained by economic dependency, family hierarchy, or normative expectations. Research among young women has shown that barriers to asset development and decision-making autonomy may be reproduced through household power structures and relational expectations (Nabayinda et al., 2025). Such barriers can limit women's ability to translate education, employment, or income into durable control over their lives. Similarly, studies of empowerment in livestock-based and agricultural systems indicate that control over resources, participation in decisions, and gender attitudes must be considered together when evaluating women's empowerment (Kinati et al., 2022). These findings support an ecological interpretation in which psychological empowerment emerges through continuous interaction between individual beliefs and the opportunities or constraints created by family and community systems.

Empowerment is therefore increasingly viewed as contextual rather than universal in expression. Social expectations, family norms, economic conditions, and cultural values affect how women define independence, responsibility, competence, and meaningful participation. Large-scale research on women's empowerment has shown that its dimensions evolve across social and historical contexts and cannot be reduced to a single indicator such as employment or education (Singh & Singh, 2025). Similarly, comparative sociological work has emphasized persistent methodological challenges in measuring empowerment across cultures because identical observable behaviors may carry different meanings depending on local conditions (Desai et al., 2022). These concerns strengthen the case for qualitative research that allows women to explain what empowerment means in their own lives and which factors they perceive as most influential.

Psychological empowerment also has important implications for well-being, mental health, and life satisfaction. Women who experience greater autonomy, self-efficacy, social recognition, and relational support may be better equipped to cope with stress and pursue meaningful goals, whereas environments characterized by coercion, financial insecurity, exclusion, or persistent gendered constraints may undermine psychological functioning. Evidence concerning women's mental health in conditions of violence and relational inequality demonstrates that powerlessness is not merely a social condition but can have direct emotional and psychological consequences (Antony, 2026; Navarro-Mantas et al., 2022). Conversely, supportive social structures and opportunities for meaningful participation may enhance confidence and perceived control.

Research involving women in collective and occupational settings has demonstrated that participation itself may become psychologically empowering when it is accompanied by recognition, influence, and social support (Hassan et al., 2024; Mahato & Jha, 2024).

Despite extensive research on women's economic empowerment, reproductive autonomy, employment, entrepreneurship, health decision-making, and social participation, important conceptual gaps remain. Much of the literature has examined isolated domains, such as income, fertility, entrepreneurship, violence, family decision-making, or occupational participation, rather than exploring how individual, family, and social factors operate simultaneously. Studies have shown the importance of economic independence (Hosano et al., 2026), relational support (Bastian et al., 2023), autonomy (Olwanda et al., 2024), self-efficacy (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022), and collective participation (Venugopalan et al., 2021), but fewer investigations have integrated these factors into a comprehensive psychological framework. Furthermore, quantitative indices may identify the presence or absence of empowerment-related resources without fully explaining how women interpret those resources or why similar objective conditions may produce different psychological outcomes.

This gap is especially relevant in contemporary European contexts such as Hungary, where women's empowerment is shaped by the intersection of educational attainment, labor-market participation, family expectations, caregiving responsibilities, social support, institutional resources, and individual psychological capacities. A qualitative approach can reveal how women experience these factors in everyday life and how they understand the reciprocal relationships among self-confidence, family dynamics, social participation, and structural opportunities. Such an approach is consistent with recent calls for greater contextual sensitivity in empowerment research and for attention to the lived meanings of autonomy, agency, and support rather than reliance solely on predetermined indicators (Chowdhury et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). It also provides an opportunity to identify mechanisms that may remain hidden when empowerment is assessed only through standardized measures.

At the same time, contemporary scholarship suggests that empowerment should not be idealized as an uncomplicated or uniformly positive process. Greater independence can produce new interpersonal tensions, role conflicts, or psychological burdens, particularly when changes in

women's aspirations occur faster than transformations in family or social expectations. The paradoxical effects of autonomy and education on self-esteem in relation to earlier family experiences illustrate this complexity (Zhao, 2026). Likewise, transformations in gender norms may simultaneously create opportunities and uncertainty (Alhalawani & Al-Serhan, 2024). These findings indicate that empowerment should be investigated as a negotiated process involving adaptation, resistance, relational change, and reinterpretation of personal identity.

The literature also demonstrates that women's empowerment has consequences beyond the individual level. Greater decision-making capacity may influence family health, fertility, educational investment, food security, and household welfare (Chowdhury & Haque, 2025; Sarker et al., 2024; Vijayalakshmi & Lin, 2022). Empowered participation may also strengthen community networks and increase women's visibility within social and economic institutions (Bosch et al., 2025). However, the sustainability of these outcomes depends on whether empowerment is supported across multiple levels. Economic independence without emotional support may produce strain; family encouragement without social opportunity may limit advancement; and strong personal confidence without access to institutional resources may not translate into meaningful participation. Consequently, a multidimensional understanding is necessary to explain how psychological empowerment is established, maintained, and sometimes constrained.

Taken together, the available evidence indicates that psychological empowerment among women emerges from reciprocal interactions among individual resources, family relationships, and wider social conditions. Personal factors such as self-awareness, resilience, self-efficacy, and autonomy may provide the internal basis for empowered action; family factors may strengthen or restrict these capacities through emotional support, role expectations, and decision-making arrangements; and social factors may determine whether women have access to education, employment, financial resources, supportive networks, recognition, and meaningful participation. Existing studies across diverse cultural settings consistently support the relevance of these domains, yet their interaction remains insufficiently understood from women's own perspectives (Nabayinda et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2024; Sony & Rifat, 2024). Developing an integrated qualitative account of these factors may therefore provide a more comprehensive understanding of psychological empowerment and inform

interventions designed to strengthen women's agency, well-being, and participation across personal, relational, and social contexts.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to identify and explain the individual, family, and social factors contributing to psychological empowerment among women in Hungary.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study employed a qualitative research design using conventional qualitative content analysis to identify and explain the individual, family, and social factors contributing to psychological empowerment among women in Hungary. A qualitative approach was selected because psychological empowerment is a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon influenced by personal experiences, interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, social opportunities, and broader sociocultural conditions. Accordingly, an exploratory design was considered appropriate for obtaining an in-depth understanding of women's perceptions and lived experiences regarding the conditions that strengthen their sense of autonomy, competence, self-confidence, personal control, meaningful participation, and ability to influence decisions affecting their lives. The study population consisted of adult women residing in Hungary. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling with maximum variation in order to obtain a broad range of experiences across different demographic and social backgrounds. A total of 24 women participated in the study. The participants were recruited from Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged, and Pécs to provide greater diversity in terms of place of residence and social environment. Maximum variation was considered in relation to age, educational attainment, employment status, marital status, family structure, and socioeconomic background. Eligibility criteria included being a woman aged 18 years or older, having resided in Hungary for at least three years, being able to communicate adequately in Hungarian or English, willingness to discuss personal, family, and social experiences related to empowerment, and providing informed consent to participate in the study. Women who were unable to complete the interview, withdrew their consent, or provided responses insufficient for meaningful qualitative analysis were excluded. Recruitment and interviewing continued until data saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews no longer generated

substantively new concepts, categories, or interpretations relevant to the research objectives. Saturation was observed by the twenty-first interview, after which three additional interviews were conducted to ensure that no important new conceptual information emerged. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research, confidentiality of their information, their right to decline to answer any question, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. To protect privacy, identifying information was removed from interview transcripts and each participant was assigned a unique code. All research procedures were conducted in accordance with accepted ethical principles for research involving human participants.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected using individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews supported by a researcher-developed demographic information form and an interview guide. The demographic form was used to collect general background characteristics including age, educational level, employment status, marital status, number of children, place of residence, and general socioeconomic circumstances. The semi-structured interview guide was developed on the basis of the objectives of the study and a review of the conceptual literature on psychological empowerment, women's empowerment, personal agency, family relationships, and social participation. The interview questions were deliberately open-ended to enable participants to describe their experiences in their own words and to allow unexpected concepts to emerge during the interviews. Interviews began with broad questions concerning participants' understanding and experience of psychological empowerment, followed by questions addressing personal characteristics and experiences that strengthened or weakened their sense of competence and control. Further questions explored the influence of family relationships, emotional and practical support, parental and marital experiences, distribution of responsibilities within the household, family expectations, and opportunities for independent decision-making. The social dimension of the interviews addressed participants' experiences of education, employment, financial independence, social support, friendships and social networks, participation in community activities, access to social resources, perceptions of gender-related opportunities and restrictions, and experiences within Hungarian social and cultural environments. Examples of

guiding questions included asking participants to describe situations in which they felt psychologically strong and capable of controlling important aspects of their lives, the personal qualities or experiences that contributed to this feeling, ways in which family members had facilitated or restricted their independence and self-confidence, and social conditions that had increased or reduced their opportunities for personal development and meaningful participation. Follow-up prompts such as "Can you explain this further?", "How did this experience affect you?", "What made this situation empowering or disempowering?", and "Can you provide an example?" were used to obtain more detailed accounts and clarify participants' meanings. The interview guide was reviewed before data collection by researchers familiar with qualitative methodology, psychology, gender studies, and social sciences to assess the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the questions. Minor modifications were subsequently made to improve question sequencing and reduce potential overlap. Two pilot interviews were conducted to assess the comprehensibility and appropriateness of the interview protocol. As the pilot interviews generated relevant and sufficiently rich data and no major changes were required, they were included in the final analysis. Interviews were conducted individually in a private setting or through a secure online video-conferencing platform according to participants' preferences and geographical accessibility. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 70 minutes. With participants' permission, interviews were digitally audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes documenting contextual information, notable emotional expressions, pauses, and preliminary analytical observations. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after each interview. Interviews conducted in Hungarian were analyzed in the original language to preserve conceptual meaning, and relevant excerpts used for scholarly reporting were translated into English with attention to semantic equivalence. Data collection and preliminary analysis were conducted concurrently, allowing concepts identified in earlier interviews to inform probing questions in subsequent interviews while maintaining consistency with the overall interview framework.

2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach. Analysis began concurrently with data collection and

continued throughout the interviewing process so that emerging concepts could be explored in greater depth in subsequent interviews. Each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim, and the resulting transcript was read several times to obtain an overall understanding of the participant's experiences and perspectives. The researchers then examined the transcripts line by line and identified meaning units consisting of words, sentences, or passages that contained information relevant to psychological empowerment. Meaning units were condensed without altering their underlying meaning, and initial codes were assigned to capture the central idea represented in each unit. Coding remained close to participants' accounts during the early phase of analysis to minimize the imposition of predetermined theoretical assumptions. Codes expressing similar meanings or referring to related experiences were compared continuously and grouped into preliminary conceptual clusters. Through repeated comparison, refinement, merging, and differentiation, these clusters were organized into subcategories and broader categories. Particular attention was given to determining whether each emerging concept primarily represented an individual, family, or social contributor to psychological empowerment, while allowing relationships and overlaps among these levels to remain visible in the analysis. Individual-level codes included experiences related to self-efficacy, self-awareness, resilience, autonomy, coping abilities, goal orientation, emotional regulation, perceived competence, and personal development. Family-related concepts were developed from descriptions of emotional support, communication patterns, respect for autonomy, family expectations, shared decision-making, encouragement, role distribution, and experiences of support or restriction within intimate and family relationships. Social-level categories were derived from participants' experiences regarding employment, education, economic opportunities, social networks, community participation, social recognition, gender norms, institutional resources, and access to supportive environments. The constant comparative method was used throughout the analytical process to compare codes within and across interviews, identify similarities and differences among participants, examine negative or contrasting cases, and refine category boundaries. Analytical memos were written during coding to document conceptual decisions, emerging relationships, and interpretations. Data saturation was assessed through ongoing comparison of successive interviews and was considered achieved when additional data no longer produced new codes or

meaningfully modified the developing categories. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the data, iterative interviewing, member checking with selected participants, and discussion of codes and categories among members of the research team. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining a systematic audit trail documenting coding decisions, changes in category structure, and analytical memos. Confirmability was supported by retaining the connection between interpretations and original interview material and by using reflexive notes to identify assumptions that could influence interpretation. Transferability was facilitated through detailed description of participant characteristics, recruitment procedures, research context, and analytical processes, enabling readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to other populations and settings. The final analytical framework was developed after repeated review of all coded material and represented the principal individual, family, and social factors perceived by women as contributing to their psychological empowerment.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 24 women participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 56 years, with a mean age of 38.17 years. Seven participants were between 20 and 29 years of age, eight were between 30 and 39 years, five were between 40 and 49 years, and four were aged 50 years or older. In terms of educational attainment, three participants had completed secondary education, six held post-secondary vocational or associate-level qualifications, nine had a bachelor's degree, and six held a master's degree or higher. Regarding employment status, 15 participants were employed full-time, four were employed part-time, two were self-employed, two were unemployed at the time of the interview, and one was primarily engaged in unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities. Twelve participants were married, four were cohabiting with a partner, five were single, and three were divorced or separated. Fourteen participants had at least one child, while 10 had no children. With respect to place of residence, nine participants lived in Budapest, six in Debrecen, five in Szeged, and four in Pécs. The participants therefore represented diverse educational, occupational, family, and residential backgrounds. This heterogeneity was important because the analysis indicated that psychological empowerment was not experienced as an isolated personal

characteristic but rather as a dynamic condition emerging from interactions among individual capabilities, family relationships, and social opportunities.

The qualitative analysis produced 683 initial codes. Following repeated comparison, condensation, merging, and conceptual refinement, these codes were organized into 27 subcategories and nine major categories. The nine major categories were subsequently classified under three overarching dimensions: individual factors, family factors, and social factors contributing to psychological empowerment among women. The individual dimension included self-awareness and self-acceptance, perceived competence and self-efficacy, psychological resilience and

adaptive coping, and autonomy and purposeful agency. The family dimension comprised emotional security and supportive relationships, equitable family interaction and decision-making, and family encouragement for personal development. The social dimension included access to socioeconomic opportunities and supportive social participation and recognition. The resulting structure demonstrated that psychological empowerment was described by participants as a multilayered process in which internal psychological resources were reinforced or constrained by the quality of intimate relationships and by the availability of social, educational, occupational, and economic opportunities.

Table 1

Overall Qualitative Structure of Factors Contributing to Psychological Empowerment Among Women

Overarching Dimension	Major Category	Main Meaning Reflected in Participants' Accounts	Number of Subcategories	Number of Initial Codes
Individual factors	Self-awareness and self-acceptance	Awareness of personal needs, strengths, values, emotions, and limitations, accompanied by acceptance of oneself	3	72
Individual factors	Perceived competence and self-efficacy	Belief in one's capacity to manage problems, make effective decisions, and accomplish personally meaningful goals	3	81
Individual factors	Psychological resilience and adaptive coping	Capacity to recover from difficulties, regulate distress, tolerate uncertainty, and use constructive coping strategies	4	79
Individual factors	Autonomy and purposeful agency	Ability to make independent choices, establish boundaries, pursue goals, and experience control over important life decisions	3	76
Family factors	Emotional security and supportive relationships	Experience of acceptance, emotional availability, trust, encouragement, and reliable support from family members	3	74
Family factors	Equitable family interaction and decision-making	Participation in decisions, fair distribution of responsibilities, respect for opinions, and reduction of controlling family patterns	3	68
Family factors	Family encouragement for personal development	Support for education, employment, skill development, independence, and personal aspirations	3	67
Social factors	Access to socioeconomic opportunities	Availability of education, employment, income, financial resources, institutional support, and opportunities for advancement	3	87
Social factors	Supportive social participation and recognition	Access to supportive networks, social belonging, participation, respect, visibility, and recognition of women's capabilities	2	79
Total	9 major categories		27	683

As shown in Table 1, the largest number of initial codes was related to access to socioeconomic opportunities, followed by perceived competence and self-efficacy, supportive social participation and recognition, and psychological resilience and adaptive coping. This pattern suggested that participants did not define psychological empowerment only as an internal feeling of confidence or emotional strength. Instead, empowerment was repeatedly connected to whether women had practical opportunities to use their abilities, make decisions, achieve financial security, participate in social life, and receive recognition for their contributions. At the same time, the high frequency of codes

associated with self-efficacy, resilience, and autonomy indicated that the ability to benefit from external opportunities depended substantially on internal psychological capacities. Participants frequently described empowerment as a reciprocal process: personal confidence increased their willingness to pursue educational, occupational, and social opportunities, while successful participation in such contexts further strengthened confidence, competence, and autonomy. Family relationships occupied an intermediate and highly influential position in this process because supportive families could strengthen women's internal resources and facilitate access

to external opportunities, whereas controlling, dismissive, or inequitable family environments could weaken self-

confidence and restrict independent action even when social opportunities were theoretically available.

Table 2

Individual and Family Factors Contributing to Psychological Empowerment Among Women

Dimension	Major Category	Subcategory	Representative Open Codes
Individual	Self-awareness and self-acceptance	Recognition of personal strengths and limitations	Identifying personal abilities; recognizing limitations without self-devaluation; realistic self-evaluation; awareness of personal resources; accepting imperfection
Individual	Self-awareness and self-acceptance	Emotional self-awareness	Recognizing emotional needs; understanding sources of distress; naming emotions; recognizing emotional triggers; distinguishing personal wishes from others' expectations
Individual	Self-awareness and self-acceptance	Positive self-regard	Self-respect; reduced self-criticism; accepting one's identity; valuing personal achievements; maintaining dignity in difficult relationships
Individual	Perceived competence and self-efficacy	Confidence in problem solving	Believing in one's ability to handle problems; approaching rather than avoiding difficulties; finding alternative solutions; learning from previous success
Individual	Perceived competence and self-efficacy	Decision-making confidence	Trusting personal judgment; taking responsibility for decisions; reducing excessive dependence on others' approval; making choices despite uncertainty
Individual	Perceived competence and self-efficacy	Mastery through achievement	Experiencing success at work or study; completing difficult tasks; learning new skills; receiving evidence of competence; setting progressively challenging goals
Individual	Psychological resilience and adaptive coping	Recovery from adversity	Rebuilding life after setbacks; learning from difficult experiences; maintaining hope after failure; continuing despite discouragement
Individual	Psychological resilience and adaptive coping	Emotional regulation	Managing anger and anxiety; avoiding impulsive reactions; pausing before responding; maintaining emotional balance under pressure
Individual	Psychological resilience and adaptive coping	Flexible coping	Seeking solutions according to circumstances; changing ineffective strategies; asking for help when necessary; balancing persistence and withdrawal
Individual	Psychological resilience and adaptive coping	Tolerance of uncertainty	Functioning despite unclear outcomes; accepting that not everything can be controlled; managing fear of change; tolerating temporary instability
Individual	Autonomy and purposeful agency	Independent choice	Choosing education, work, relationships, and lifestyle based on personal values; resisting unwanted pressure; taking ownership of important decisions
Individual	Autonomy and purposeful agency	Boundary setting and assertiveness	Saying no; expressing disagreement; protecting personal time; communicating needs; challenging disrespectful behavior
Individual	Autonomy and purposeful agency	Goal-directed action	Establishing personal goals; planning for the future; persistence in pursuing aspirations; monitoring progress; acting intentionally rather than reactively
Family	Emotional security and supportive relationships	Emotional acceptance	Being listened to; feeling understood; receiving empathy; being accepted without constant judgment; having a psychologically safe home environment
Family	Emotional security and supportive relationships	Reliable instrumental support	Receiving practical help during crises; childcare support; assistance with household responsibilities; support during illness or work pressure
Family	Emotional security and supportive relationships	Encouragement and affirmation	Family members expressing confidence; recognizing achievements; reinforcing women's abilities; encouraging persistence during setbacks
Family	Equitable family interaction and decision-making	Shared decision-making	Participation in financial decisions; involvement in family planning; mutual consultation; recognition of women's opinions in major household decisions
Family	Equitable family interaction and decision-making	Fair distribution of responsibilities	Sharing domestic work; equitable childcare; reducing unequal emotional labor; balancing employment and household duties
Family	Equitable family interaction and decision-making	Respect for personal boundaries	Freedom from excessive monitoring; respect for privacy; acceptance of independent friendships and activities; absence of coercive control
Family	Family encouragement for personal development	Educational support	Encouragement to continue education; financial or emotional support for study; valuing women's learning and intellectual development
Family	Family encouragement for personal development	Occupational support	Supporting employment; respecting career ambitions; helping reconcile work and family demands; valuing women's professional identity
Family	Family encouragement for personal development	Support for independence and growth	Encouraging new experiences; supporting skill development; accepting changes in women's roles; facilitating financial and personal independence

Table 2 provides a more detailed representation of the individual and family-level mechanisms identified in the

interviews. At the individual level, psychological empowerment was strongly associated with a shift from

externally defined self-worth toward a more stable internal sense of value and competence. Participants described becoming more empowered when they could identify their own preferences, emotions, abilities, and limitations without evaluating themselves exclusively through the expectations of partners, parents, colleagues, or broader social norms. Self-awareness was therefore not described merely as introspection; it functioned as a prerequisite for intentional action because women indicated that recognizing their own needs allowed them to establish clearer boundaries and make more consistent decisions. Perceived competence developed through successful experiences, particularly when participants solved difficult problems, acquired new skills, completed education, advanced professionally, or managed demanding family circumstances. Resilience was described as equally important because empowerment often emerged through the process of responding to adversity rather than through the absence of hardship. Participants emphasized emotional regulation, flexible coping, and the ability to continue functioning despite uncertainty. Autonomy represented the behavioral expression of these internal capacities and was reflected in independent decision-making, assertiveness, boundary setting, and purposeful pursuit of goals.

At the family level, participants emphasized that psychological empowerment was significantly influenced by whether the family environment communicated trust, respect, and legitimacy to women's choices. Emotional acceptance created a sense of security from which participants felt more able to explore opportunities and tolerate failure. Reliable practical support was especially important among participants with children or demanding employment responsibilities because the redistribution of caregiving and domestic responsibilities increased their ability to invest time in education, work, self-care, and social participation. Shared decision-making was repeatedly described as an indicator of respect and equality. Participants distinguished between nominal consultation and genuine participation, emphasizing that empowerment was strengthened when their preferences could meaningfully influence household decisions. Conversely, excessive control, repeated dismissal of women's opinions, unequal domestic expectations, and dependence on family approval were described as psychologically restricting. Family encouragement for education, work, and independence was especially influential because participants often interpreted such encouragement as evidence that their personal development was considered legitimate rather than selfish or incompatible with family responsibilities.

Table 3

Social Factors and Perceived Pathways Through Which They Promote Psychological Empowerment

Major Category	Subcategory	Social Conditions Identified by Participants	Perceived Psychological Effect
Access to socioeconomic opportunities	Educational opportunity and lifelong learning	Access to formal education; professional training; language learning; digital learning; continuing education; affordable courses	Increased competence, future orientation, confidence, and perceived control
Access to socioeconomic opportunities	Employment and professional participation	Access to meaningful employment; fair recruitment; career progression; flexible work; supportive workplaces; recognition of professional contribution	Increased self-efficacy, social identity, independence, and sense of usefulness
Access to socioeconomic opportunities	Economic and institutional resources	Personal income; financial literacy; access to banking and services; social protection; childcare support; counseling and community services	Reduced dependency, greater decision-making power, security, and freedom of choice
Supportive participation and recognition	Supportive social networks and community belonging	Friendships; peer support; women's groups; professional networks; community participation; opportunities to exchange experiences	Reduced isolation, emotional support, normalization of difficulties, and increased confidence
Supportive participation and recognition	Social recognition and gender-respectful environments	Respect for women's opinions; recognition of competence; non-discriminatory treatment; positive representation of women; safety in public and professional spaces	Increased dignity, legitimacy, social confidence, and willingness to participate

Table 3 demonstrates that social empowerment mechanisms were primarily associated with access to tangible opportunities and the experience of being recognized as a legitimate and competent social actor. Education was described as empowering not only because it

produced qualifications but also because it expanded participants' perceived options, enhanced their ability to communicate and solve problems, and reduced dependence on others for information and decision-making. Employment played a similarly multidimensional role. Participants

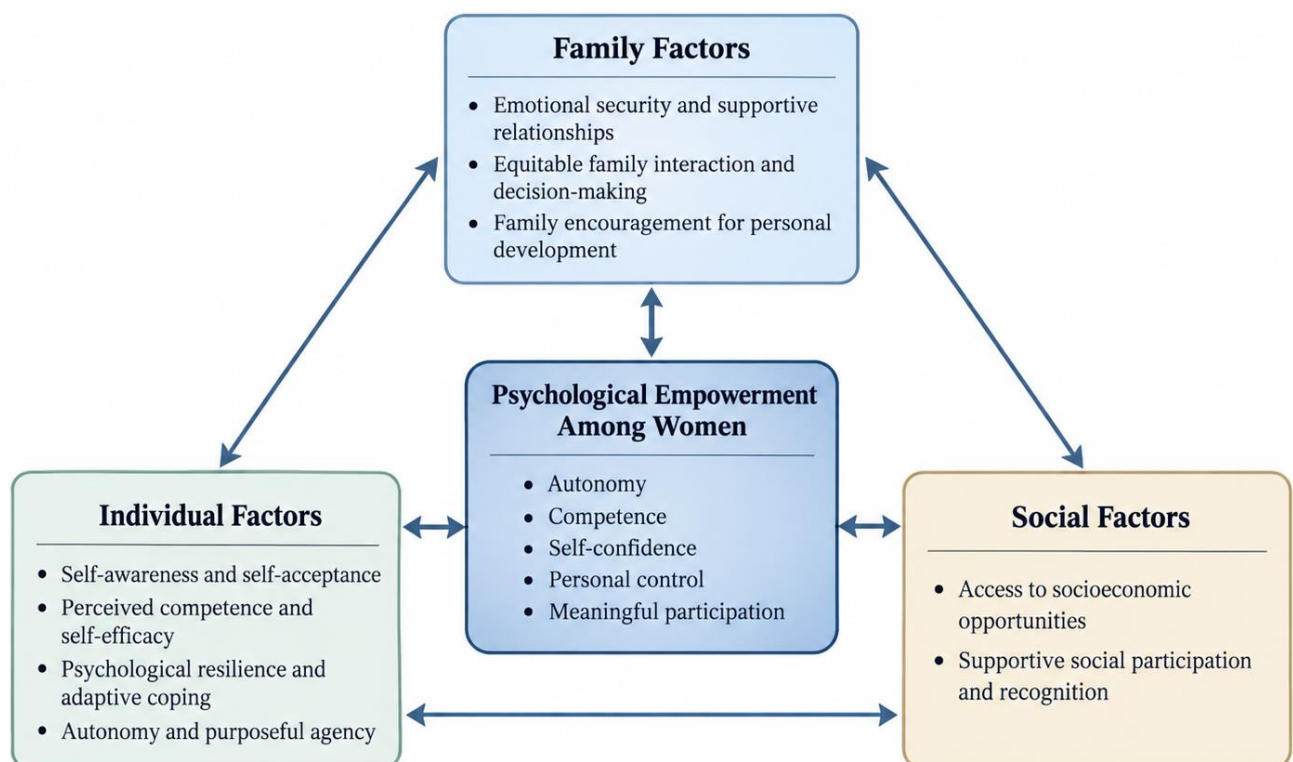
emphasized that meaningful work could provide financial resources, daily experiences of competence, social connection, and an identity beyond family roles. However, employment was not uniformly empowering. Participants distinguished supportive workplaces from environments characterized by limited advancement, gender stereotyping, inflexible schedules, or insufficient recognition. Thus, the quality of occupational participation was as important as employment itself. Financial independence was repeatedly associated with greater freedom in everyday choices and with the ability to leave or challenge situations perceived as harmful or unfair. Institutional supports, particularly accessible childcare, social services, professional counseling, and educational resources, were described as mechanisms that transformed individual motivation into realistic opportunities for action.

Social networks constituted another major source of empowerment. Participants frequently explained that

supportive friendships and peer relationships provided a space in which experiences could be discussed without immediate judgment. Such relationships reduced isolation and helped women recognize that personal difficulties were sometimes connected to broader family or social patterns rather than individual inadequacy. Professional and community networks were also important because they provided information, role models, practical opportunities, and validation. Social recognition had a distinct psychological effect: when participants felt that their ideas, work, and contributions were taken seriously, they reported greater willingness to speak, participate, and assume responsibility. In contrast, repeated experiences of dismissal, discrimination, stereotyping, or social invisibility could undermine confidence even among women who otherwise possessed strong personal resources. The findings therefore indicated that social context could either activate or suppress existing psychological capacities.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Interaction Among Individual, Family, and Social Factors Contributing to Psychological Empowerment Among Women



The conceptual model represented in Figure 1 illustrates psychological empowerment as a dynamic outcome of interaction among three interdependent levels rather than as the consequence of a single determinant. Individual

psychological resources formed the internal foundation of empowerment by enabling women to recognize their abilities, regulate emotions, cope with adversity, establish boundaries, and pursue goals. However, these resources

were strengthened when family relationships provided emotional security, equitable decision-making, practical assistance, and encouragement for development. Family support, in turn, increased women's capacity to make effective use of educational, occupational, economic, and social opportunities. At the social level, access to resources and recognition created conditions in which personal competence could be translated into actual participation and influence. The relationship among the three dimensions was reciprocal. Successful participation in employment, education, and community life reinforced self-efficacy and personal agency; increased self-efficacy improved women's capacity to negotiate family relationships and seek opportunities; and supportive family environments reduced psychological and practical barriers to social participation. Conversely, restriction at any one level could weaken the empowering effects of the other two. For example, a woman with high personal competence could experience limited empowerment when family control or economic dependency restricted her ability to act, while substantial social opportunities might remain underused when persistent self-doubt or lack of family support undermined participation.

A further interpretive finding concerned the developmental nature of empowerment. Participants generally did not describe themselves as either empowered or disempowered in a fixed manner. Instead, empowerment changed across life stages and domains. A participant could feel highly competent professionally while feeling constrained in family decision-making, or could experience substantial autonomy in personal relationships while remaining economically insecure. Empowerment also appeared to accumulate through repeated experiences of effective action. Small successful decisions, acquisition of new skills, receipt of supportive feedback, or successful boundary setting often produced greater confidence for subsequent action. This cumulative process was especially apparent among participants who described transitions such as completing higher education, entering employment, ending an unsupportive relationship, becoming financially independent, returning to work after childbirth, or developing new social networks. Such transitions were not necessarily empowering by themselves; rather, they became empowering when they increased participants' perceived ability to influence the direction of their own lives.

Another prominent pattern was the importance of psychological legitimacy. Participants frequently indicated that empowerment required more than having formal permission or objective opportunities to make decisions.

They also needed to perceive their own wishes, ambitions, and boundaries as legitimate. Some participants described earlier periods in which they technically had access to education or employment but hesitated to pursue these opportunities because they felt obligated to prioritize others' expectations or feared being judged as selfish, inadequate, or insufficiently family-oriented. Psychological empowerment increased when women reconstructed these beliefs and came to view self-development, financial independence, personal boundaries, and participation in decision-making as compatible with rather than opposed to family and social responsibility. Supportive family members, peers, mentors, and workplace relationships often accelerated this change by affirming women's right to pursue personal development.

The findings additionally showed that economic independence operated as a cross-cutting factor linking the social, family, and individual dimensions. Participants did not describe income merely as a material resource. Having personal financial resources was associated with increased confidence, reduced vulnerability, greater bargaining power within relationships, broader choice, and greater ability to plan for the future. Women who had experienced periods of financial dependence described greater difficulty asserting preferences or leaving unfavorable circumstances. In contrast, even modest personal income was sometimes interpreted as psychologically meaningful because it provided evidence of competence and reduced the perceived need to seek permission for everyday decisions. Nevertheless, participants emphasized that economic resources alone did not ensure empowerment. Financially independent women could still experience low self-confidence, family pressure, or workplace discrimination. Economic independence was therefore best understood as an enabling condition whose empowering effect depended on interaction with psychological resources and relational support.

Family support also emerged as qualitatively different from family protection or control. Participants valued emotional closeness and practical assistance but emphasized that support became empowering only when it respected autonomy. Family behaviors intended as protection could be experienced as disempowering when they involved excessive monitoring, discouragement from taking reasonable risks, restriction of mobility, or repeated questioning of women's judgment. In contrast, empowering support involved being available when needed while preserving the woman's authority over her own decisions. This distinction was particularly evident in discussions of

education, employment, intimate relationships, parenting, and relocation. Participants perceived the most empowering family environments as those in which advice could be offered without becoming coercion and where women's decisions remained respected even when relatives disagreed with them.

The interaction between social belonging and individual self-confidence represented another important theme. Participants who had access to supportive peer groups, friendships, professional networks, or community relationships reported greater confidence in expressing opinions and seeking opportunities. These networks provided informational resources and practical assistance but also served a psychological function by creating alternative sources of recognition beyond the family. For women who had experienced criticism or limited encouragement within their families, supportive social networks could partially compensate by reinforcing competence and normalizing aspirations. Conversely, social isolation amplified the impact of family difficulties because women had fewer opportunities to compare experiences, receive alternative perspectives, or obtain practical support. The findings therefore demonstrated that social networks functioned both as direct sources of empowerment and as buffers against restrictive interpersonal environments.

Overall, the findings indicated that psychological empowerment among women was best conceptualized as an emergent and relational process produced through the interaction of personal capacities, supportive family structures, and enabling social environments. Individual factors provided the psychological readiness for empowered action; family factors either reinforced or constrained this readiness; and social factors determined the extent to which competence and agency could be exercised in meaningful contexts. The analysis further indicated that empowerment was strengthened when women experienced consistency across these levels. The strongest accounts of psychological empowerment were found when participants simultaneously described confidence in their own abilities, respect and support within close relationships, and realistic access to educational, occupational, financial, and social opportunities. In contrast, incongruence among these dimensions created partial or fragile empowerment. These findings establish the basis for interpreting psychological empowerment as a multidimensional process in which internal development and external conditions continuously influence one another.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to identify and explain the individual, family, and social factors contributing to psychological empowerment among women in Hungary. The findings showed that psychological empowerment was not experienced as a single psychological characteristic or as the direct consequence of one external resource. Rather, it emerged through the interaction of individual capacities, family relationships, and broader social opportunities. At the individual level, self-awareness and self-acceptance, perceived competence and self-efficacy, psychological resilience and adaptive coping, and autonomy and purposeful agency were identified as central factors. At the family level, emotional security and supportive relationships, equitable family interaction and decision-making, and family encouragement for personal development were prominent. At the social level, access to socioeconomic opportunities and supportive social participation and recognition were especially important. Taken together, these findings support a multidimensional and relational understanding of psychological empowerment in which women's internal resources are continuously strengthened or constrained by interpersonal relationships and structural conditions.

One of the most prominent findings was the importance of self-awareness and self-acceptance as a psychological foundation of empowerment. Participants described becoming more empowered when they were able to identify their own needs, values, strengths, emotional states, and personal boundaries rather than defining themselves primarily through external expectations. This finding suggests that empowerment begins partly with the development of a coherent and internally anchored sense of self. Such an interpretation is consistent with research indicating that self-esteem, autonomy, and prior relational experiences can interact in complex ways in shaping women's psychological functioning (Zhao, 2026). It also corresponds with findings showing that women's well-being and life satisfaction are closely related to perceived meaning, relational quality, self-evaluation, and a sense of personal control (Abbasi, 2026). The present results therefore indicate that self-awareness is not merely reflective but functional: by clarifying what women value and what they consider acceptable, it facilitates more deliberate decision-making, clearer interpersonal boundaries, and greater consistency between personal goals and behavior.

Perceived competence and self-efficacy constituted another major component of psychological empowerment. Participants frequently described successful problem solving, mastery of difficult tasks, educational achievement, occupational accomplishments, and effective management of life challenges as experiences that strengthened their belief in their own capabilities. This finding is closely aligned with the multidimensional model proposed by Al-Rashdi and Abdelwahed, in which self-efficacy was identified as an important mediating mechanism in women's empowerment (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022). Similar patterns have been reported in research linking physical self-efficacy, agency, autonomy, and psychological empowerment among women (Mosanya & Kassie, 2024). These converging findings suggest that self-efficacy is one of the main psychological processes through which external resources become internalized as empowerment. Education, employment, or social participation may offer opportunities, but their psychological impact is likely to be strongest when women interpret successful engagement with these opportunities as evidence that they are capable of shaping outcomes.

The present study also identified resilience and adaptive coping as central to empowerment. Participants did not describe empowerment as freedom from difficulty; rather, many associated it with the capacity to recover from adversity, regulate emotions, tolerate uncertainty, and continue pursuing goals despite setbacks. This interpretation is important because women may encounter empowerment-related challenges precisely in contexts characterized by relational conflict, discrimination, financial insecurity, caregiving burdens, or gender-based restrictions. Research on mental health and psychosocial interventions for individuals exposed to gender-based violence has emphasized the importance of rebuilding safety, agency, coping capacity, and psychological functioning after adverse experiences (Antony, 2026). Similarly, evidence regarding women exposed to intimate partner violence demonstrates that economic disadvantage, relational dependency, and vulnerability can undermine both mental health and perceived control (Abdelwahed et al., 2025). Research on power and agency in intimate relationships further indicates that limited relational power can affect women's psychological well-being and mental health (Navarro-Mantas et al., 2022). The present results extend these observations by suggesting that resilience itself may become an empowerment resource when women interpret previous

coping success as evidence of their capacity to manage future challenges.

Autonomy and purposeful agency were also repeatedly emphasized by participants. Psychological empowerment was associated with being able to make independent choices, establish interpersonal boundaries, express disagreement, and pursue personally meaningful goals. This finding is consistent with research showing that autonomy is strongly linked to women's well-being, although its expression depends on cultural and relational contexts (Kumar et al., 2024). It also corresponds with evidence that decision-making authority and access to resources are important indicators of women's empowerment in household and livelihood settings (Kinati et al., 2022). The distinction made by participants between formal choice and meaningful autonomy is particularly noteworthy. Women may technically be permitted to make decisions, yet still feel constrained by anticipated disapproval, economic dependence, family pressure, or internalized expectations. Therefore, empowerment involves not only the availability of alternatives but also a subjective sense of legitimacy in choosing among them.

The family-related findings showed that emotional security and supportive relationships played an important role in reinforcing psychological empowerment. Participants emphasized being listened to, respected, encouraged, and supported during difficulty. Such relational security appeared to strengthen confidence and facilitate risk-taking in domains such as education, employment, and personal development. These results are consistent with research demonstrating that strong relational ties can function as important empowerment resources, particularly in contexts where close networks provide emotional support, legitimacy, information, and access to opportunities (Bastian et al., 2023). Family support has also been identified as an important component of multidimensional empowerment models, particularly through its relationship with self-efficacy and women's capacity to act independently (Al-Rashdi & Abdelwahed, 2022). The present findings further suggest that family support is psychologically empowering when it affirms women's competence rather than replacing their decision-making authority.

Equitable family interaction and shared decision-making emerged as another important dimension. Participants described psychological empowerment as stronger when they had meaningful participation in household, financial, parenting, and relational decisions and when domestic responsibilities were distributed fairly. This result is in line

with evidence showing that women's household decision-making is associated with socioeconomic behavior and broader patterns of autonomy (Mbah et al., 2023). Studies of maternal health decision-making have similarly shown that women's autonomy affects their ability to access services and participate actively in decisions concerning their own health (Olwanda et al., 2023, 2024). These findings collectively indicate that household decision-making is not simply an operational matter but an important symbolic expression of relational power. When women's opinions influence actual outcomes, they receive confirmation that their judgment and preferences are legitimate. Conversely, repeated exclusion from decisions may weaken self-efficacy and reinforce dependency.

Family encouragement for education, employment, and personal development was also identified as a significant contributor to empowerment. Participants described family support as especially important during transitions involving continued education, career development, parenthood, or changes in personal goals. This finding corresponds with evidence that women's agency is closely connected to marital quality and the extent to which intimate relationships permit meaningful negotiation of aspirations and roles (Yunizar & Xiong, 2025). It also resonates with research showing that married women's psychological well-being can be affected by relational and contextual pressures (Tohan et al., 2025). At the same time, women whose life trajectories diverge from conventional family expectations may rely particularly strongly on alternative support systems, as suggested by research on singlehood and intersectional support networks (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2025). Thus, family encouragement appears to function as a legitimizing force that communicates that women's personal growth is compatible with valued family relationships rather than in conflict with them.

The findings also highlighted the importance of access to socioeconomic opportunities. Education, employment, income, financial literacy, and institutional resources were described as mechanisms through which women could expand choices and reduce dependency. This finding is strongly supported by research on financial independence and relational empowerment, which has shown that economic resources can alter bargaining power and increase women's capacity to influence important decisions (Hosanoo et al., 2026). However, the participants' accounts also indicated that economic participation alone was not sufficient. This is consistent with evidence showing that female day laborers may contribute substantially to

household income while continuing to experience limited security, recognition, or decision-making power (Sony & Rifat, 2024). Similarly, research on microfinance has questioned whether access to credit alone produces meaningful empowerment when relational and social inequalities remain unchanged (Pervin et al., 2023). These findings support the conclusion that economic resources are enabling conditions rather than automatic guarantees of psychological empowerment.

The role of entrepreneurship, collective organization, and social capital in previous research also aligns with the present findings. Entrepreneurial activities may increase empowerment by expanding access to resources and reinforcing social networks, especially when accompanied by microfinance and social capital (Andriani et al., 2022). Multi-actor engagement can further strengthen women's entrepreneurship by linking individual initiative to institutions, networks, and community resources (Venugopalan et al., 2021). Participation in self-help groups has likewise been associated with psychological empowerment through mechanisms such as mutual support, shared learning, collective identity, and increased confidence (Mahato & Jha, 2024). These studies help explain why participants in the present study described socioeconomic opportunity as most empowering when it was combined with supportive relationships and meaningful social participation rather than experienced in isolation.

Supportive social participation and recognition constituted the second major social dimension identified in the study. Participants emphasized the importance of friendships, peer networks, professional relationships, community participation, and environments in which women's contributions were taken seriously. This finding is consistent with research showing that psychological empowerment can be shaped by participation and cultural context in occupational settings (Hassan et al., 2024). It also corresponds with scholarship emphasizing the importance of increasing women's visibility and influence in organizational and intellectual spaces (Bosch et al., 2025). Recognition appears to have an important psychological function because it provides external confirmation that women's abilities and perspectives are socially legitimate. Repeated experiences of dismissal or invisibility, by contrast, may undermine willingness to participate even when women possess strong individual capabilities.

The importance of social recognition is also relevant to organizational and leadership contexts. Research on women's management empowerment has emphasized that

structural access to leadership positions must be accompanied by changes in organizational culture, historical assumptions, and gendered expectations (Samier & ElKaleh, 2021). The present findings support this argument by showing that employment is psychologically empowering when it provides not only income but also voice, competence, recognition, and opportunities to influence outcomes. This may help explain why women can be economically active without necessarily experiencing strong psychological empowerment. Meaningful participation requires a social environment in which competence is acknowledged and where women have realistic opportunities to exercise agency.

Another important finding was the reciprocal nature of the relationships among the individual, family, and social domains. Participants' experiences suggested that these dimensions continuously influenced one another. Greater self-confidence helped women seek occupational and social opportunities; successful participation in these settings reinforced perceived competence; supportive family relationships facilitated participation; and increased financial independence could strengthen autonomy within family relationships. This reciprocal structure is compatible with multidimensional approaches to empowerment that reject single-indicator models (Chowdhury et al., 2024; Desai et al., 2022). Research on women's empowerment in relation to fertility similarly indicates that educational, relational, and socioeconomic factors interact in shaping decision-making outcomes (Chowdhury & Haque, 2025). The present findings therefore reinforce the conceptualization of empowerment as a system of mutually reinforcing resources and experiences.

The study also showed that empowerment is contextual and varies across life domains. Women could feel highly empowered at work while experiencing limited autonomy in family relationships, or they could possess substantial personal confidence while lacking economic security. This domain-specific pattern is consistent with scholarship emphasizing the evolving and multidimensional nature of women's empowerment (Singh & Singh, 2025). Studies in coastal and rural communities have similarly demonstrated that empowerment is shaped by livelihood conditions, household roles, decision-making opportunities, and access to productive resources (Rahman et al., 2024; Sarker et al., 2024). These findings indicate that empowerment should not be treated as a binary state. Instead, women may simultaneously experience empowerment and constraint across different domains.

The importance of social and cultural norms also emerged indirectly throughout the findings, especially in relation to whether women felt entitled to pursue autonomy, education, employment, or personal development. This is consistent with research showing that changing gender norms can reshape women's opportunities while also creating new tensions and vulnerabilities (Alhalawani & Al-Serhan, 2024). Similar concerns arise in studies of young women whose access to assets and decision-making autonomy remains constrained by household hierarchies and social expectations (Nabayinda et al., 2025). The present study therefore suggests that psychological empowerment requires more than individual motivation. Women must also operate within environments that recognize their choices as socially legitimate and provide sufficient room for those choices to have practical consequences.

The findings concerning social support are also consistent with evidence that digital and interpersonal networks can expand women's participation in family decisions. Social media use, for example, has been associated with mothers' influence over educational expenditures by providing information, connection, and new forms of participation (Vijayalakshmi & Lin, 2022). More broadly, access to supportive networks may reduce isolation and allow women to compare experiences, identify alternatives, and reinterpret problems that might otherwise be viewed as personal failures. This mechanism may be especially relevant for women experiencing family pressure or limited local opportunities, because external networks can provide both emotional validation and practical resources.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the results support an ecological and relational conceptualization of psychological empowerment. Individual resources such as self-awareness, self-efficacy, resilience, and agency establish the internal capacity for empowered behavior, but their expression depends heavily on family and social contexts. Family support can amplify confidence and facilitate participation, while inequitable relationships can undermine autonomy. Social opportunities can convert personal capacities into meaningful achievements, but their effects depend on whether women receive recognition, access resources, and experience real rather than symbolic participation. This interpretation is consistent with research across diverse settings demonstrating that women's empowerment is associated with autonomy, economic participation, social capital,

decision-making, and institutional opportunity (Olwanda et al., 2024; Pervin et al., 2023; Venugopalan et al., 2021). The present study contributes to this literature by integrating these elements within a single qualitative framework centered specifically on psychological empowerment.

6. Limitations and Suggestions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a qualitative design with a relatively small purposively selected sample of 24 women, and the findings are therefore intended to provide conceptual depth rather than statistical generalizability. Although maximum variation sampling was used, the experiences of women living in other regions of Hungary, women from highly marginalized groups, recent migrants, ethnic minorities, women with severe socioeconomic disadvantage, or those who were unable or unwilling to participate may not have been fully represented. Second, the findings were based on self-reported interview data and may have been influenced by recall processes, social desirability, or participants' willingness to disclose sensitive family and psychological experiences. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the study did not allow examination of how empowerment develops longitudinally across major life transitions. Finally, although procedures were used to enhance credibility and dependability, qualitative interpretation inevitably involves researcher judgment, and alternative analytical frameworks might organize some experiences differently.

Future studies should examine the identified framework using larger and more diverse samples and should include women from different regions, socioeconomic groups, ethnic communities, age groups, and family structures. Quantitative studies could develop and validate measures based on the individual, family, and social dimensions identified in the present research and test the relative contribution of each factor to psychological empowerment. Structural equation modeling could be used to investigate mediating and moderating pathways, including whether self-efficacy mediates the effects of social opportunity or whether family support moderates the relationship between economic independence and psychological empowerment. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for examining how empowerment changes across transitions such as higher education, marriage, childbirth, divorce, migration, unemployment, career advancement, and retirement. Comparative studies across European countries could

determine which aspects of the proposed framework are broadly transferable and which are strongly context-dependent. Mixed-methods research could further integrate standardized indicators with detailed accounts of lived experience.

The findings suggest that programs designed to promote women's psychological empowerment should operate simultaneously at individual, family, and social levels rather than focusing exclusively on personal skills or economic participation. Psychological and educational interventions can strengthen self-awareness, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, assertiveness, boundary setting, and goal-directed behavior. Family-oriented programs should promote equitable communication, shared decision-making, recognition of women's autonomy, and fair distribution of caregiving and domestic responsibilities. At the social and institutional level, policies and services should facilitate access to education, continuing professional development, employment, childcare, financial resources, mentorship, community networks, and psychologically safe environments in which women's competence is recognized. Employers and community organizations can also strengthen empowerment by creating opportunities for meaningful participation, leadership, and decision-making rather than merely increasing women's numerical representation. Coordinating interventions across these levels is likely to produce more sustainable empowerment because it strengthens both women's internal capacities and the relational and structural conditions necessary to exercise them.

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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

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

References

- Abbasi, A. (2026). A Phenomenological Exploration of Life Satisfaction Among Older Iranian Women. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10284677/v1>
- Abdelwahed, A., Zhao, X., Gendia, M. A., & Ebrahim Abbas Abdullah Abbas, A. (2025). Intimate Partner Violence Among Poor Disabled Women in Egypt. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 41(9-10), 2242-2276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605251326079>
- Al-Rashdi, N. A. S., & Abdelwahed, N. A. A. (2022). The Empowerment of Saudi Arabian Women Through a Multidimensional Approach: The Mediating Roles of Self-Efficacy and Family Support. *Sustainability*, 14(24), 16349. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142416349>
- Alhalawani, S., & Al-Serhan, A. (2024). Reshaping Gender Norms: Exploring the Ripple Effect of Refugeeism on Women's Empowerment. *Development Policy Review*, 42(6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12805>
- Andriani, L., Lal, S., & Kalam, A. A. (2022). Entrepreneurial Activities and Women Empowerment in Rural India Between Microfinance and Social Capital. *Strategic Change*, 31(2), 227-237. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsc.2492>
- Antony, T. A. (2026). Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions for Individuals Affected by Gender-Based Violence in Fragile Contexts: A Systematic Review. *Cambridge Prisms Global Mental Health*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2026.10272>
- Bastian, B. L., Wood, B. P., & Ng, P. Y. (2023). The Role of Strong Ties in Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Collectivist Contexts. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 15(1), 122-146. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijge-10-2021-0171>
- Bosch, A., Jaga, A., Carrim, N. M. H., & Ngunjiri, F. W. (2025). Making Africa Visible: Pathways for Intellectual Activism in Work and Organization. *Gender Work and Organization*, 33(3), 689-697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.70077>
- Chowdhury, S., & Haque, M. A. (2025). Understanding the Issues of Women's Empowerment and Fertility in Bangladesh. *Reproductive Health*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-025-02065-3>
- Chowdhury, S., Khan, M. M. H., & Haque, M. A. (2024). Construction of Women's Empowerment Index for Bangladesh. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1356756>
- Desai, S., Chen, F., Reddy, S., & McLaughlin, A. (2022). Measuring Women's Empowerment in the Global South. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 48(1), 507-527. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-030420-015018>
- Hassan, A. F., Samah, A. A., Hariza, A. B., & Rosnon, M. d. R. (2024). Relationship Between Participation in Implementation, Cultural Collectivism, and Psychological Empowerment Among Women in Zanzibar Tourism Industry. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(11). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i11/22915>
- Hosano, Z., Rughoobur-Seetah, S., Soupramanien, L. D. B., Doargajudhur, M., Lichy, J., & Wheatley, D. (2026). Gender and Power: Financial Independence and Women's Relational Empowerment in the Global South. *Gender Work and Organization*, 33(4), 1283-1297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.70123>
- Kinati, W., Baker, D., Temple, E. C., Najjar, D., & Mulema, A. A. (2022). Empowerment Resources, Decision-Making and Gender Attitudes: Which Matter Most to Livestock Keepers in the Mixed and Livestock-Based Systems in Ethiopia? *Cabi Agriculture and Bioscience*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43170-022-00114-6>
- Kumar, P., & Mukherjee, A. (2025). Reimagining Singlehood in Urban India Through Intersectional Narratives and Support Systems: An Ethnographic Study. *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 51(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.70049>
- Kumar, V., Maral, P., Upadhyay, A., & Azam, S. F. (2024). Women: Autonomous Bodies, Are They? Understanding Autonomy and Well-Being. *The Oriental Anthropologist a Bi-Annual International Journal of the Science of Man*, 24(2), 246-261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558x241277121>
- Mahato, T., & Jha, M. K. (2024). Does Participation in Self-Help Group Affect the Psychological Empowerment of Tribal Women? Evidence From India. *International Journal of Development Issues*, 23(3), 447-462. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijdi-11-2023-0265>
- Mbah, C. S., Isiugo-Abanihe, U. C., & Nwokocho, E. E. (2023). Influence of Household Decisions on the Socio-Economic and Fertility Behaviour of Women in Rural Nigeria. *Journal of International Cooperation and Development*, 6(2), 91. <https://doi.org/10.36941/jicd-2023-0014>
- Mosanya, M., & Kassie, S. (2024). Psychological Empowerment and Exercising: The Relationships Between Exercising, Self-stereotyping, Agency, Autonomy and Physical Self-efficacy in <sc>non-Western</Sc> Women. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 34(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2791>
- Nabayinda, J., Nabunya, P., Bahar, O. S., Kizito, S., Stark, L., Namatovu, P., Witte, S. S., Neilands, T. B., McKay, M. M., & Ssewamala, F. M. (2025). <i>She Is a Guest in My House</i>: Exploring the Barriers to Asset Development and Decision-Making Autonomy Among Young Women in Southern Uganda. *Journal of International Development*, 37(7), 1543-1554. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.70022>
- Navarro-Mantas, L., Lemus, S. d., García-Sánchez, E., McGill, L., Hansen, N., & Megías, J. L. (2022). Defining Power and Agency in Gender Relations in El Salvador: Consequences for Intimate Partner Violence and Women's Mental Health. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.867945>
- Olwanda, E., Opondo, K., Oluoch, D., Croke, K., Maluni, J., Jepkosgei, J., & Nzinga, J. (2023). The Role of Women's Autonomy and Empowerment in Maternal Health Decision Making: Implications on the Implementation Process of a Service Delivery Reform in Kenya. a Qualitative Exploratory Study. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3581151/v1>

- Olwanda, E., Opondo, K., Oluoch, D., Croke, K., Maluni, J., Jepkosgei, J., & Nzinga, J. (2024). Women's Autonomy and Maternal Health Decision Making in Kenya: Implications for Service Delivery Reform - A Qualitative Study. *BMC Women's Health*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-024-02965-9>
- Pervin, S., Ismail, M. N., & Noman, A. H. M. (2023). Does Microfinance Singlehandedly Empower Women? A Case Study of Bangladesh. *Sage Open*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221096114>
- Rahman, M. W., Haque, A. B. M. M., Zaman, T., Palash, M. S., Nahiduzzaman, M., & Nazia, T. (2024). Women Empowerment Status in the Coastal Fishing Communities of Bangladesh. *Sage Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241250114>
- Samier, E. A., & ElKaleh, E. S. (2021). Towards a Model of Muslim Women's Management Empowerment: Philosophical and Historical Evidence and Critical Approaches. *Administrative Sciences*, 11(2), 47. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11020047>
- Sarker, T., Roy, R., Yeasmin, S., & Asaduzzaman, M. (2024). Enhancing Women's Empowerment as an Effective Strategy to Improve Food Security in Rural Bangladesh: A Pathway to Achieving SDG-2. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1436949>
- Singh, B., & Singh, S. K. (2025). Evolving Dimensions of Women's Empowerment in India. *PLoS One*, 20(7), e0327494. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0327494>
- Sony, S. F., & Rifat, A. H. (2024). Female Day Laborers and Empowerment: A Study on Some Selected Rural Areas in Kishoreganj District, Bangladesh. *International Journal of Sociology and Humanities*, 6(1), 84-97. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648679.2024.v6.i1b.79>
- Tohan, M. M., Zaman, S., Sultana, N., Nurullah, A. S., & Rahman, M. A. (2025). Extent of Anxiety Among Married Women in Bangladesh and Its Potential Predictors: A Nation-Wide Cross-Sectional Study. *Depression and Anxiety*, 2025(1). <https://doi.org/10.1155/da/7415491>
- Venugopalan, M., Bastian, B. L., & Viswanathan, P. K. (2021). The Role of Multi-Actor Engagement for Women's Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Kerala, India. *Administrative Sciences*, 11(1), 31. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11010031>
- Vijayalakshmi, A., & Lin, M. H. (2022). One-click at a Time: Empowering Mothers for Their Adolescent Children's Educational Expenditures Through Social Media Usage. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(3), 1112-1125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12891>
- Yunizar, C. H., & Xiong, Z. B. (2025). Investigating Early-Married Women's Perceived Agency and Marital Quality in Rural Indonesia. *Family Sciences*, 1(2), 15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/famsci1020015>
- Zhao, M. (2026). The Paradox of Empowerment: How Education and Autonomy in Mate Choice for Marriage Amplify the Impact of Childhood Harsh Parenting on Self-Esteem Among Women in Beijing. *Family Sciences*, 2(2), 16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/famsci2020016>