



**DESIGNING EMPLOYMENT-CENTERED EMPOWERMENT MODEL FOR RURAL WOMEN  
HEAD OF HOUSEHOLDS IN ILAM PROVINCE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THEIR  
PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES**

**PROJETO DE MODELO DE EMPODERAMENTO CENTRADO NO EMPREGO PARA  
MULHERES RURAIS CHEFES DE FAMÍLIA NA PROVÍNCIA DE ILAM, COM ÊNFASE EM  
SUAS COMPETÊNCIAS PROFISSIONAIS**

**DISEÑO DE UN MODELO DE EMPODERAMIENTO CENTRADO EN EL EMPLEO PARA  
MUJERES RURALES JEFAS DE HOGAR EN LA PROVINCIA DE ILAM CON ÉNFASIS EN SUS  
COMPETENCIAS PROFESIONALES**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to design an employment-centered empowerment model for rural women head of households in Ilam province with an emphasis on their professional competencies. This research in terms of the level of supervision and degree of control is field and in terms of access to the facts and data processing is survey research type and in terms of data collection is causal-correlation. The statistical population was all rural women head of households in Ilam province, 14156 people. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table, 374 people. Regarding the availability of the list of all women in the study, systematic sampling was used. The data gathering tool was a questionnaire whose content validity was provided through a panel of experts. Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha. The results of SEM using AMOS24 software showed that in the standard state is 0.83. Therefore, in both cases, the effect of professional competencies on employment-centered empowerment is a strong effect.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Professional competencies, Women head of households, Structural equation

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**Resumo:** O objetivo deste estudo é projetar um modelo de empoderamento centrado no emprego para mulheres rurais chefes de família na província de Ilam, com ênfase em suas competências profissionais. Esta pesquisa em termos de nível de supervisão e grau de controle é de campo e em termos de acesso aos fatos e processamento de dados é do tipo pesquisa de pesquisa e em termos de coleta de dados é correlação causal. A população estatística era composta por mulheres rurais chefes de família na província de Ilam, 14156 pessoas. O tamanho da amostra foi determinado usando a tabela de Krejcie e Morgan, 374 pessoas. Quanto à disponibilidade da lista de todas as mulheres no estudo, foi utilizada amostragem sistemática. A ferramenta de coleta de dados foi um questionário cuja validade de conteúdo foi fornecida por um painel de especialistas. A confiabilidade do questionário foi confirmada pelo alfa de Cronbach. Os resultados do SEM usando o software AMOS24 mostraram que no estado padrão é 0,83. Portanto, em ambos os casos, o efeito das competências profissionais no empoderamento centrado no emprego é um forte efeito.

**Palavras-chave:** Empoderamento, Competências profissionais, Mulheres chefes de família, Equação estrutural

**Resumen:** El propósito de este estudio es diseñar un modelo de empoderamiento centrado en el empleo para mujeres rurales jefas de hogar en la provincia de Ilam con énfasis en sus competencias profesionales. Esta investigación en términos del nivel de supervisión y grado de control es un campo y en términos de acceso a los hechos y el procesamiento de datos es un tipo de investigación de encuesta y en términos de recopilación de datos es una correlación causal. La población estadística era todas las mujeres rurales cabeza de familia en la provincia de Ilam, 14156 personas. El tamaño de la muestra se determinó utilizando la tabla Krejcie y Morgan, 374 personas. En cuanto a la disponibilidad de la lista de todas las mujeres en el estudio, se utilizó un muestreo sistemático. La herramienta de recopilación de datos fue un cuestionario cuya validez de contenido se proporcionó a través de un panel de expertos. La fiabilidad del cuestionario fue confirmada por el alfa de Cronbach. Los resultados de SEM con el software AMOS24 mostraron que en el estado estándar es de 0,83. Por lo tanto, en ambos casos, el efecto de las competencias profesionales en el empoderamiento centrado en el empleo es un efecto fuerte.

**Palabras clave:** Empoderamiento, Competencias profesionales, Mujeres jefas de hogar, Ecuación estructural

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Rural women have a decisive role in rural development, so from an economic point of view, rural women produce more than half of all food produced in the countryside. In fact, women are household economic managers; they carry out many activities related to the preparation, maintenance and process of food, and play an important role in livestock keeping, food production, fuel collection and household economic management. In the last few years, it is clear that a major share of rural household income comes from women's activities, and in some cases women's share in household economic is more than men (Emadi, 2001). Unfortunately, despite their significant role



in different aspects of rural development, their role has been ignored. One of the reasons why the role of women in rural development programs has been diminished is the lack of women capability and the uncertainty of planners about their ability, which is why women are more likely to be subjected to poverty and gender discrimination than men (Barimani & Khodaverdilo, 2010). This makes women always considered as vulnerable groups in rural development programs (ALI, ZARAFSHANI, & OULAEI, 2007).

Although the economic necessity of employment and participation of women in economic activities has always been in the history of the society's development, but there is still a discriminatory situation in this case. One of the reasons is the lack of attention to women's education and the lack of suitable grounds for creating their employment opportunities. This deprivation has severely degraded the socioeconomic status of women in the process of sustainable development (Papzan, Khaledi, & Sulaimany, 2011). In this regard, women head of households have worse situation than other women. The bad economic situation has led female head of households and their children to be among the most vulnerable group in society against social harms (Boldaji, Foruzan, & Rafiey, 2011). However, the study of the lives of women head of households in the urban areas of Ilam province in Iran showed that 64.44% of the female head of households of the province live only with their children, which had the highest women head of households among the provinces of the country in 2011 (Eftekhari, Payandeh, Torabi, & Chegini, 2013). There are many reasons for considering women head of households as a vulnerable group; including the poverty and inappropriate economic situation and the social and cultural problems of these women and their families, which threat women in real life, because the pressures from poverty and the severe need and disability in meeting basic needs and accepting the others' domination provide them grounds for crime (Afshani & Fatehi, 2016). Thus, at the beginning of 1970, rural development experts focused on rural women, and this particular attention to rural women led to the implementation of many plans for vulnerable women, one of which was the empowerment plan for rural women.

Empowering means enhancing the capabilities of supported individuals so that they can be the best in their careers and succeed in it. Considering the importance of empowerment and its impact on different economic, social and cultural variables, there is a need for a comprehensive study related to the subject of research, and considering the complexity of this category and its multidimensional nature, the design of a suitable model for empowerment of women head of households and the influential factors in this category can help us to answer questions that are relevant to the subject matter of the research. The main issue of the present research is to find out



what is the appropriate model of employment-centered empowerment for rural women head of households in Ilam province? Therefore, the purpose of this study is to design an employment-centered empowerment model for rural women head of households in Ilam province with an emphasis on their professional competencies.

## 2 THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Women in all countries are one of the goals of development and play a very important role in economic, political, social and cultural developments. Women make up half of the human resources of the community, so ignoring those means incomplete development plans. For this reason, strategies and development plans need to address the various needs of women in different aspects. The goals of developmental plans about women are to develop their talents and abilities and to employ them in a comprehensive development (Ramazani, Karbasian, & Mobasheri, 2018). One of the most important pillars of sustainable development is the empowerment of society, especially women. With empowerment, society can take the path of growth and development based on sustainability. Empowering means expanding the freedom of individuals to choose and acting to shape people's lives. This concept means controlling resources and decisions. In a holistic approach, empowerment means empowering individuals, that is, helping them to strengthen their sense of self-confidence and overcome their inability or helplessness (Golzari & Mirdamadi, 2013). Accordingly, empowerment is not something to be granted (Anabestani, Shayan, Khosrovbaygi, & Taghilu, 2014). This process enables individuals to gain autonomy, control and self-confidence, and with a sense of individual and collective power to overcome existing limitations (Khani, Motiee Langeroodi, & Sayyad Bidhendi, 2012). Empowering women as a general concept of empowerment means coping with women's powerless status. This concept refers to the provision of more resources and benefits for women.

Many studies have been conducted on the empowerment of women. Ahmadi, Nemati, and Firoozi (2016) in a study entitled "Investigating the employment of rural women and its impact on the socio-economic status of the village in the eastern Barbrood rural district of Aligudarz County", concluded that while there was a significant difference between the mean of social, mental relaxation and economic indicators; there was no significant difference between social indicators and mental relaxation indicators, but there was a significant difference between the mean of economic indicators. KhosraviPour (2015) conducted an investigation aimed at finding individual,



social and environmental constraints and barriers to entrepreneurship development among rural women in the Badr district of Qorveh city and showed that government funding and bank loans and access to the market could make a new business. The results regarding the most important obstacles to rural women's entrepreneurship development revealed that social and cultural factors and the government are the most important factors, and providing financial resources by banks, identifying, exploiting and developing natural and Eco touristic attractions, creating entrepreneurship associations and increasing the government's attention to promote rural development are considered as the most important solutions to reduce barriers to entrepreneurship development in the region.

Khandan (2015) in their research entitled "Assessing the effectiveness of community-based rehabilitation plan for empowering rural disability women in Birjand, South Khorasan", concluded that the relationship between respondent's assessment of the effectiveness of community-based rehabilitation program (as a dependent variable) and independent variables of life satisfaction, self-assessment of life quality, skills, education, needs-based approach and cooperation, institutional integrity of the plan, and income and social support of the program, is positive and significant. Also, variables of life satisfaction, self-assessment of life quality, and cooperation and institutional coherence of community-based rehabilitation program had a significant effect on assessing respondents from plan effectiveness.

Farrashi, Gholamrezaei, and Rahimian (2015) investigated the effects of micro-credits on the economic and social empowerment of poor rural women in Nahavand county, Hamedan province, and concluded that the impact of credit use on livestock, poultry nurturing, beekeeping, turkeys, fisheries, the cultivation of saffron, mushrooms, medicinal plants and gardening have direct and significant effect on the economic empowerment of rural women, but the consumption of credit in the areas of carpet weaving, tailoring, art activities, health and treatment, education of children and shopkeeper has no effect on the social empowerment of rural women. Fallahifar (2016), in a research aimed at the geographical analysis of empowerment and deprivation of rural women, compared with urban women in the central district of Boyerahmad city, concluded that rural women have lower abilities in comparison with urban women in terms of selected indicators of empowerment. According to the results, there was a significant and negative relationship between the deprivation and empowerment of rural women, with the increase in the level of deprivation, the women empowerment is reduced and vice versa, with the increase in the level of women's empowerment, their deprivation rate is reduced.

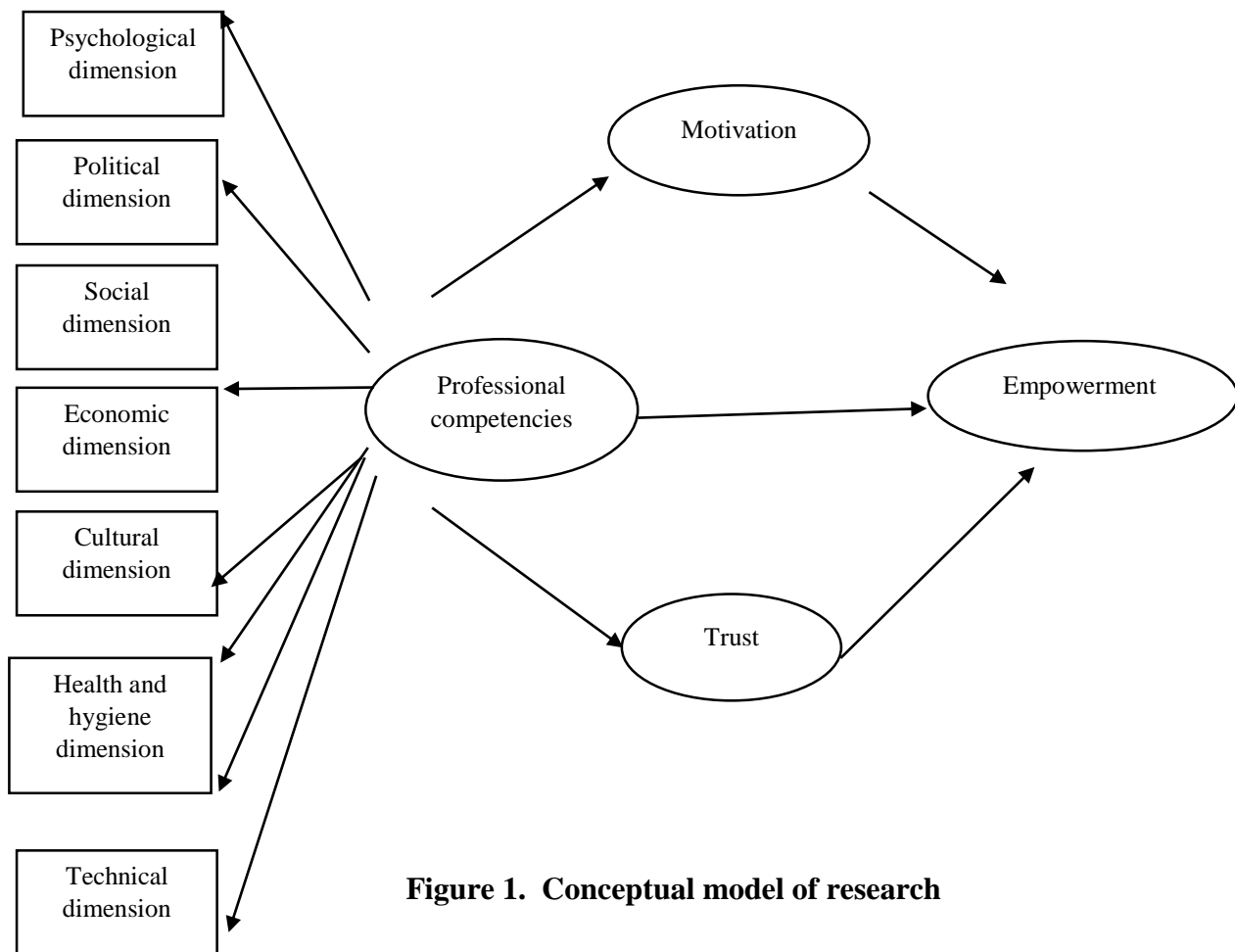


Qanbari and Ansari (2015), in a study entitled "Identifying and explaining the socio-economic factors affecting the empowerment of rural women", concluded that the most important factors affecting the empowerment of rural women include their cooperation in economic activities, individual and social factors. The most basic barriers to women's empowerment are factors such as lack of job opportunities, low educational levels, family decisions and lack of legal protections and communication networks. Kermani, Mazloum Khorasani, Behravan, and Noghani (2012) in a research entitled "Factors affecting women's empowerment" concluded that the highest rate impact have been related on dimension of economic empowerment which focused on the progress motivation, autonomy, the acquisition of technical skills, employment and income generation, and eventually physical health. Wang and Wong (2011) argue that as much as women's empowerment increases, their productivity, political participation and social role are also increased, which it requires raising the level of education and women education.

Chiang and Hsieh (2012) emphasized the impact of psychological empowerment on employment, and showed that women's access to social services was not sufficient and make them vulnerable. On the other hand, Liu, Esteve, and Treviño (2017), in a study entitled "Women head of households and living conditions in Latin America" concluded that the number of women head of households is rising increasingly around the world and families with a women header are poorer than families with men header, so policymakers should provide equal opportunities for women.

Findings of studies in Iran and elsewhere in the world show that women head of family have been exposed to chronic and persistent pressures and negative social attitudes and receive very little social support. Therefore, the high level of mental disorders in them is not surprising. In fact, the high level of mental health problems is caused by economic and social conditions, not by gender (Abbas Zadeh, Budaghi, Alamdari, & Alamdari, 2016). Considering the importance of empowerment and its impact on different economic, social and cultural variables, there is a need for a comprehensive study related to the subject of research, and considering the complexity of this category and its multidimensional nature, the design of a suitable model for empowerment of women head of households and the influential factors in this category can help us to answer questions that are relevant to the subject matter of the research. Therefore, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive model for empowerment of rural women head of households. Accordingly, the conceptual model of the research is considered as Fig. 1.





**Figure 1. Conceptual model of research**

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research in terms of the level of supervision and degree of control is field and in terms of access to the facts and data processing is survey research type and in terms of data collection is causal-correlation. The statistical population was all rural women head of households in Ilam province, 14156 people. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table, 374 people. Regarding the availability of the list of all women in the study, systematic sampling was used. The data gathering tool was a researcher-made questionnaire, which was designed in two sections according to the research objectives and the study variables. In the first section, the individual characteristics of people were measured. The second part consists of dimensions of professional competencies and empowerment variables that are designed and measured in the form of a five-level Likert scale. The content (face) validity of the questionnaire was also provided through a panel of experts. 306 questionnaires were collected in this study. Reliability of the





questionnaire was also measured by Cronbach's alpha. The results of the Cronbach's alpha test (Table 1) show that the Alpha rate of the research variables is good and acceptable.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha value of the studied variables

Row	Section or variable	Number of items	Value of Cronbach's Alpha
1	Psychological dimension	19	0.82
2	Political dimension	15	0.78
3	Social dimension	15	0.85
4	Economic dimension	13	0.93
5	Cultural dimension	12	0.88
6	Technical dimension	7	0.91
7	Health and hygiene	8	0.87
8	Empowerment	20	0.92
9	Motivation	8	0.85
10	Trust	10	0.73

In this study, dependent variables including employment-centered empowerment, independent variables including seven dimensions of professional competencies (psychological, political, social, economic, technical, cultural, health and hygiene), and motivation and trust were also mediated variables. In the descriptive statistics section for describing the data, frequency distribution tables, and tendency to center indicators and dispersion from it including Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Standard Error (SE) were used. In inferential statistics, Pearson correlation test first and then the pattern of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or multivariate analysis was used. SEM provides a coherent framework for estimating the power of relations between all the variables of a theoretical model. This pattern allows the researcher to test a set of regression equations simultaneously (Sharafi, 2014). The SEM used in this research was a general type model (a combination of measuring and structural model). The result of the measurement model is the confirmatory factor analysis that was used for its structural validity and the structural model was also used to test the theories of the research (assessment of causal effects and level of explained variance). SPSS<sub>25</sub> and Amos<sub>24</sub> software were used for data processing.





## 4 RESULTS

The results showed that the average age of the studied people was 43.6 years, the oldest of whom was 86 and the youngest was 21 years of age. Also, the majority of the studied people with a frequency of 102 (33.33%) were in the age group of 31 to 40 years old. 88 (28.8%) of the subjects are illiterate and 66 (21.6%) have elementary education, and few have higher educational levels. According to the selected sample from the research statistical population, 250 people (81.7%), the largest number of studied people, are unemployed. 276 (90.2%) of the subjects are covered at least by one type of support through supportive organizations, and 30 (9.8%) are not supported by any organization. The highest percentage and frequency are related to the Imam's Khomeini Relief Committee. According to the selected sample of the research statistical population, 100 (32.7%) of the people tend to have a home-based activity and 21 (6.9%) tend to have a small tendency to work at home.

Table 2. Description of the variables studied

Variables	Frequency	Mean
Age	.....	<b>43.56</b>
Level of Education	88 people (28.8%) are illiterate 66 people (21.6%) elementary education 47 people have diploma 50 people college degrees	
Marriage status	131 people (42.8%) widows 104 people (33.98%) were married 17 people (5.5%) were single	
Employment status	250 people (81.7%) were unemployment	
Status covered by supportive organizations	276 people (90.2%) are covered at least by one kind of support from supportive organizations 30 people (9.8%) were supported by no organization The highest percentage and frequency relate to Imam Khomeini Relief Committee	
Tendency to do home-based activities	100 people (32.7%) have a high tendency to do home-based activities 21 people (6.9%) have a low tendency to do home-based activities	



### Pearson correlation analysis

Since the variables of this study have a normal distribution, in order to test the relationship between the variables of research, Pearson correlation coefficient was used, the result is presented below. The results of correlation coefficient between economic, psychological, political, social, cultural, technical, health and hygiene dimensions, professional competencies and employment-centered empowerment showed that there is a significant relationship between these variables at a significant level of 1% (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of correlation of research variables with empowerment based on Pearson correlation coefficient

First variable	Second variable (professional competency dimensions)	Pearson correlation coefficient	Significant level
Empowerment	The economic dimension of professional competence	0.404**	0.000
	Psychological dimension of professional competence	0.601**	0.000
	Political dimension of professional competence	0.406**	0.000
	Social dimension of professional competence	0.616**	0.000
	Cultural dimension Professional competence	0.544**	0.000
	Technical dimension of professional competence	0.441**	0.000
	Health and hygiene dimension of professional competence	0.501**	0.000
	The motivation of rural women	0.306*	0.042
	Trust of rural women	0.403*	0.038

Significant levels: \*\*:  $P \leq 0.01$  \*:  $P \leq 0.05$

### Structural equations and the relationship between the variables of the conceptual model

In addition to the analysis that was expressed, the SEM has been also used in this study. The SEM used in this research was a general type model (a combination of measuring and structural model). The results of the estimation of the measurement model are presented in Table (4). According to the proposed criteria in this table, it can be concluded that the variables used in this research are a suitable model for employment-centered empowerment of women head households.



### A. Approval model

In this section, the results of the research conceptual framework test are presented in the form of a SEM using the Amos software. SEM is a combination of factor analysis model and path model.

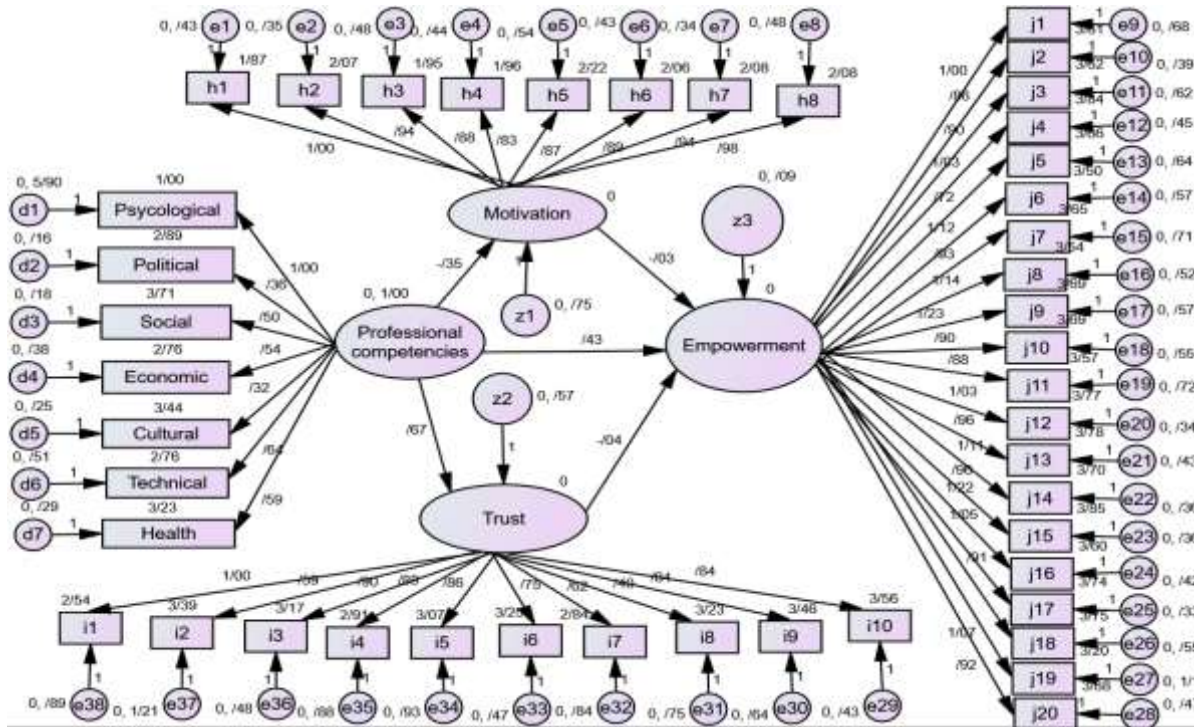


Figure 2. Factor model of research and path coefficients in unstandardized state.

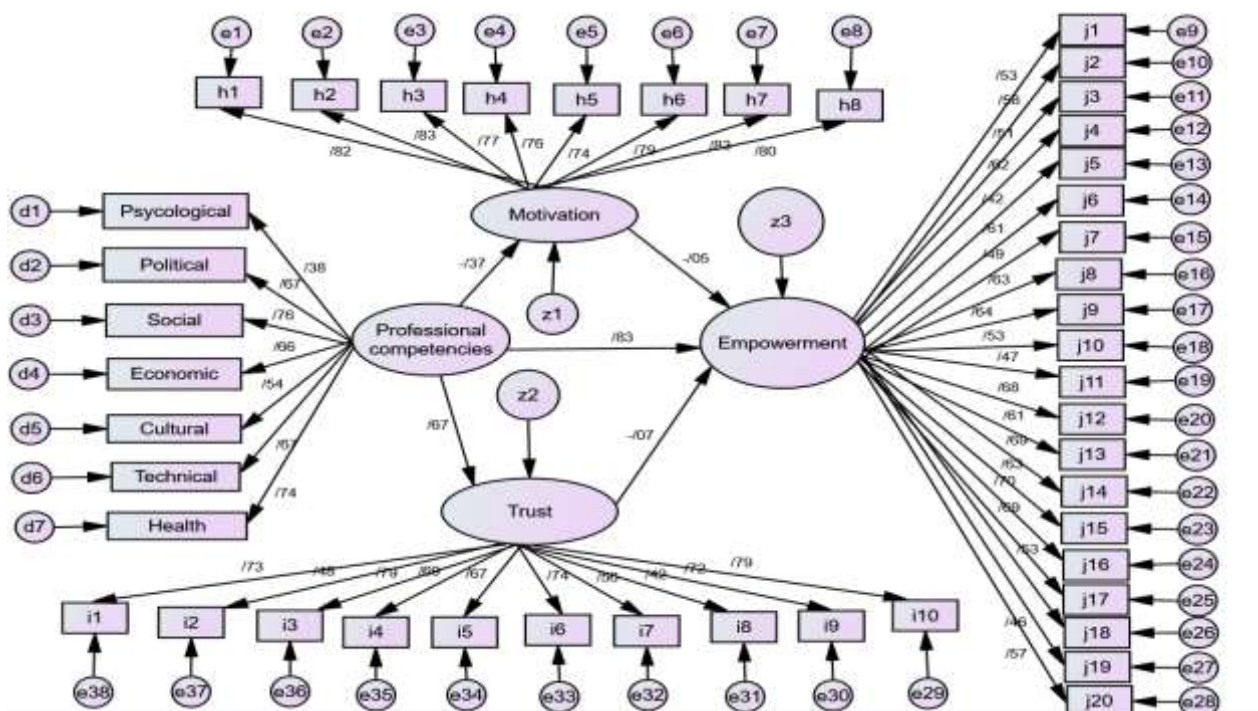


Figure 3. Factor model of research and path coefficients in standardized state.



In general, this model is a structural model that shows how the main variables of the model affect or interact with each other. As shown in Figure 2, in the non-standard state, the effect of professional competencies on employment-centered empowerment is 0.43. In other words, if we assume that the effect of other variables is constant, by increasing one unit of standard deviation in professional competencies, there would be an increase of 0.43 unit in employment-centered empowerment. According to model (3), at the standard state, the effect of professional competencies on employment-centered empowerment is 0.83. Therefore, in both cases, the effect of professional competencies on employment-centered empowerment is a strong effect. On the other hand, the effect of professional competencies on trust variable is 0.67 in both non-standard and standard state, which is a strong effect, while the trust variable (with a coefficient of -0.04 in non-standard states and -0.07 in standard states) has not had much impact on employment-centered empowerment. The effect of professional competencies on the motivation variable is in the non-standard state (-0.35) and in the standard state (-0.37). Also, motivation has not had a significant effect on employment-centered empowerment and in both cases has had a very weak effect (non-standard coefficient of -0.30 and standard coefficient of -0.05).

### Model fit indicators

In general, there are several fitness indicators for evaluating SEM. In this research, for evaluating the structural model, Chi-Square (CMIN), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normality Fit Index (NFI) and very important indicator of Root Mean Square Error Estimate (REMSE) were used.

Table 3. Fit indices of measurement model

Fit index	Favorite criteria	Reported value
Chi-Square	$\leq 3$	2.251
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	$0.9 \geq$	0.921
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	$0.9 \geq$	0.911
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	$0.9 \geq$	0.913
Parsimonious Fit Index (PCFI)	$0.5 \geq$	0.652
Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	$0.08 \leq$	0.07

Since the amount of Chi-Square (CMIN / DF) in the current study was 2.251, the CFI index (0.921), the IFI index (0.911), the NFI index (0.913), the PCFI index (0.652) And the RMSEA index was 0.07, thus indicating the suitability of the model.



## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In recent years, women's empowerment is one of the most important rural development policies. In this study, the employment-centered empowerment model of rural women head of households in Ilam province was analyzed. Correlation analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between the economic dimension of professional competences and empowerment. Since economic factors and having sufficient capital plays an effective role in launching any kind of business, it can be said that in the studied area, this factor has a significant effect on the empowerment of women head of households. Since most rural women head of households do not have adequate financial resources, economic factor is one of the most important factors that can be effective in empowering and creating women's employment, so that if these people have enough money, they can easily launch a business. The results of Ahmadi, et al. (2016) and Kermani, et al. (2012) confirm this finding.

Correlation analysis showed that social and political dimensions of professional competences had a positive effect on empowerment. Therefore, it can be concluded that women will be able to start a business if social and political conditions are appropriate for women's work in society. Since there are no suitable social and political conditions for women's employment in rural areas, this factor is considered as one of the barriers to the empowerment of rural women. By improving social and political conditions and supporting women in terms of social and political, we can act effectively in the field of empowerment of rural women. Hemati Wina, Abedi Sarvestani, Abdollah Zadeh, and Mahboubi (2012) concluded that social and political factors had an impact on the empowerment of women, which confirms the results of this study.

The results of correlation analysis indicated that there was a positive significant relationship between the cultural and psychological dimensions of professional competencies and empowerment of women. This finding is in line with the results of the study by Hemati Wina, et al. (2012). They concluded that cultural and psychological factors had a significant effect on women empowerment. Since rural women head of households are under certain cultural conditions in the rural environment and also because of their living conditions, they are different from other women in terms of psychological. Therefore, due to their psychological characteristics and improving their cultural conditions in the village, it is possible to create a field of empowerment and business creation for rural women head of households.





Technical factors have a positive significant effect on the empowerment of rural women head of households. Since the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge is one of the effective factors in empowering women and creating any business, therefore, by providing effective education in the field of employment creation as well as training for each type of business, an effective step can be taken to empower rural women. On the other hand, health and hygiene dimension of professional competencies have a positive effect on the empowerment of rural women head of households and this is one of the basic needs of women. Therefore, by improving the health conditions and paying attention to the health of rural women, especially rural women head of the households, we can, to a large extent, provide empowerment grounds for these women. The structural model showed that in the non-standard state, the effect of professional competencies on employment-centered empowerment is 0.43 and in the standard state is 0.83. Therefore, in both cases, the effect of professional competencies on employment-centered empowerment is a strong effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that professional competencies have a large effect on the empowerment of rural women head of the household. These results are in line with the studies of Kalantari, Shabanali, and Soroushmehr (2010) and Qanbari and Ansari (2015). The researchers concluded that the factors affecting women's empowerment were the components of professional competencies, including individual-psychological, economic participation, infrastructure, and socio-institutional. On the other hand, the results of structural equations showed that the effect of professional competencies on trust variable in both standard and non-standard states is a strong effect, while the trust variable has not had a strong effect on employment-centered empowerment. The results showed that the effect of professional competencies on the motivational variable is a weak effect. Motivation has also not had much impact on employment-centered empowerment, and in both cases it has had a very weak effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that in this study, motivation has no effect on the empowerment of rural women. Many factors affect the empowerment of rural women head of the households. The results of present study also showed that all aspects of professional competencies have a positive effect on women empowerment. Therefore, the variables of trust and motivation are important in the next stages and, the results of present study, which have been obtained from the viewpoint of rural women head of households, indicate that these two variables do not have a significant effect on their empowerment.

Empowering women increases their self-confidence, gaining an independent identity and improving their social status, which the entire community benefits from it. Part of the social security of these women is provided by educating women head of households to learn jobs or find suitable



work for them or their children and their permanent participation in social and cultural activities. In fact, by increasing the empowerment of women, their social security is provided. The results of this study showed that in addition to technical and psychological factors, economic, social and cultural factors have a significant effect on empowerment of women. Therefore, it is suggested that, in order to increase social-political participation and social health of women head of households, governmental and supportive institutions take the necessary steps to change the attitude of society towards these families in order to solve their social isolation problem. Conducting educational classes to strengthen life skills, decision making, problem solving and social and communication skills of women head of households and increase the level of political awareness by emphasizing their valuable role in community development can be effective. Since all dimensions and in sum the variables of professional competencies have had a great effect on empowerment, it is recommended that authorities of women's support institutions carry out more efforts to strengthen all aspects of professional competence. These authorities by strengthening professional competencies in women can take effective steps to empower rural women, especially women head of households.

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