

Development of 'Power within' among the Women: A Road to Empowerment

Hedayat Allah Nikkhah

Department of Social and Development Sciences
Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
E-mail: hnik2003@yahoo.com

Ma'rof Redzuan

Department of Social and Development Sciences
Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
E-mail: marof@putra.upm.edu.my

Asnarulkhadi Abu-Samah

Department of Social and Development Sciences
Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
E-mail: asnarul@putra.upm.edu.my

Received: March 1, 2011

Accepted: July 6, 2011

Published: January 1, 2012

doi:10.5539/ass.v8n1p39

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n1p39>

Abstract

Globally, women are generally lower in status and power relative to men in economic, political, and job prestige. However, in general, power is not thing to be possessed only by a person or a group of individuals. Power can be gained, nurtured and sharpened and the processes to gainer acquire power in known as empowerment. Several feminist groups and NGOs have mentioned that the empowerment process should be broken down into three levels of power; they are 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within'. This study examined the power within as a type of power achieved by women in Iran. In this study power within is conceptually consisting of two elements, i.e. 'self-esteem' and 'gender awareness'. The study showed that women in Shiraz, Iran have the moderate level of power within. It means they are never disempowered nor empowered sufficiently. Organization such as NGOs can help the women to develop their power within and become empowered. The result also indicates that the NGOs have played their roles in developing the power within among the women through their functions such as, developing individual ability, educational functions, awareness building and mobilizing of women. The study discovered the developing individual ability among the other functions was most effective function contributed by NGO.

Keywords: Power, Power within, Empowerment, Women, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Iran

1. Introduction

Millions of women living in developing countries constitute 70 percent of the world's 1.3 billion poor (ILO, 2000). Ironically, most development programmes are focused on men rather than on women. Thus, gender equality has largely been ignored in development efforts, with the result that women's inequality was often untouched and sometimes aggravated by development projects. According to the World Bank (2001) the societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pay the cost of greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance, and a lower living standard of their people. However, the contributions of women to development have become increasingly recognized, resulting in progress in many countries toward reliving restrictions on women participation in political and economic activities. Overall, evidence is mounting that improved gender equality is a critical component of any development strategy.

In Iran, like many other developing countries, women's access to position of influence and power is limited, their occupational choices are narrower, and their earnings are lower than men that they must struggle to reconcile activities outside their home with their traditional roles and they are constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values. The statistics show that women represent only 2.8% of parliament's members (i.e, 8 out of 290 members). In other areas of public life women's representation is no better, as the following numbers show: members of town councils (2.66%), holding higher management posts (1.2%), in managerial positions (5.2%), and employed in government, private and public sectors (11.8%) (Tahmasebifar, 2005). This is an indication of a minimal participation of women in power and at decision making levels. Therefore, the situation shows that the women in Iran have unfavorable position in the society.

International organizations through NGOs claim that they have positive intervention to improve the situation of poor people. Most of the women's NGOs in Iran that were established are modern and developmental orientation of NGOs. There are some great examples of modern NGOs in Iran that have been successful in addressing the social issues, conducting advocacy efforts, raising public awareness and conducting educational activities and tackling tough social issues, with extensive community participation.

This study focuses on the issue of non-zero sum models of power, in particular the 'power within' among the women in Shiraz, Iran. In fact, this study aims at to determine the level of "power within" among the women after joining the NGOs programmes. The study also seeks to identify the NGOs' functions in increasing the "power within" among the women. This study is the first attempts in Iran to investigate the effectiveness of NGOs' function with regard to articulate power of women.

2. Theoretical underpinning

Globally, women are generally lower in status and power relative compare to men in economic, political, and job prestige (Burn, 2005). Embedded in it is about power relation between man and woman. Nevertheless, this lopsided power relation is not static or rigid. Power relation can change over time, when women gain power.

Some theories have discussed about women's inclusion in the development process. The women in development theory (WID) focused upon providing more power to women by changing the administrative laws to ensure that women would be increasingly integrated into national economies (Tinker, 1990, Rathgeber, 1990). WID provided opportunities for women to participate in the formal sector and in patriarchal social, political, and economic structures (Rathgeber, 1990). Thus women in development (WID) approach emphasized on the inclusion of women in development projects particularly contributed to the development discourse by ensuring women had a fair opportunity in economic development (Tinker, 1990).

On the other hand, women and development theory (WAD) which drew largely upon Marxist and dependency theories argued that women have always been part of development processes, but that they had been invisible because of structural inequalities in society (Rathgeber, 1990). In fact, WAD theories mainly perceived 'power over' as structural inequalities linked to capitalist and class structures as major sources of women's powerlessness. According to WAD, men control and maintain their power through the gender division of labor that, places men in positions of authority over women and permits them to reap disproportionate benefits (Glenn, 2004).

In the 1980s, feminist and development theorists argued that WID and WAD theories did not adequately address the factors that structure and maintain gender inequalities (Connelly et al., 2000). Therefore, a new analysis emerged known as Gender and Development approach (GAD). The lack of improvement in most women's lives is due not only to resistance to the inclusion of women in development projects, but also to the persistence of looking at women only in their roles as mothers, rather than as active agents, workers, and managers of resources (Anderson and Chen, 1988). The GAD approach encourages women to make positive change through women's organizations and activism. GAD emphasizes the empowerment of women to work to change and transform the structures that have contributed to their subordination (Burn, 2005). Therefore, the empowerment approach arose from the gender and development debate and has become a central element of development program for the new millennium. Empowerment approaches to finding effective ways of supporting women and enable them to mobilize for change comes from within them, not from outside (Rowlands, 1997).

An empowerment perspective is grounded in the belief that increasing power and control over individual and community events is an important means to improve the life situations of the powerless individuals and groups (Schulz et al., 1993). According to Datta and Kornberg (2002) empowerment includes the process by which women gain greater power over their own lives both within and outside of their home, and their power to bring about change in situations of gender inequality (Burn, 2005), which is in line with the notion of GAD. Therefore, empowerment can be considered as the process to acquire "power" individually and collectively. Thus, to

empower the women is to release their powerlessness. Power can take in many different forms. One form of power is a non-zero-sum model. Based on this model when one person's gain (power) it is not necessarily another power's loss. This model also classifies three types of power, such as "power within", "power to" and "power with" (Mosedale, 2003).

'Power within' refers to intangible assets such as self-esteem and self-confidence. This power refers to self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how individual can recognize through analyzing their experience how power operates in their lives and gain the confidence to act to influence and change the present situation to a better one (Williams et al., 1994). Rowlands (1997) has defined power within as the spiritual strength and uniqueness that exists in each one of us and makes us truthfully human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. Power within comprise of self-esteem, awareness or consciousness raising and confidence building (Oxaal and Baden, 1997).

'Power to' can be considered as generative or productive power (sometimes incorporating or manifesting as forms of resistance or manipulation) which creates new possibilities and actions without domination (Rowlands., 1997). This type of power relates to having decision-making authority, power to solve problems which can be creative and enabling (Williams et al., 1994). In other words, this is power which increases the boundaries of what is achievable for one person without necessarily tightening the boundaries of what is achievable for another party.

'Power with' refers to collective action, recognizing that more can be achieved by a group acting together than by individuals alone. Many interventions aiming to empower women note the importance of creating opportunities for women to spend time with other women reflecting on their situation, recognizing the strengths that they possessed and devising strategies to achieve positive change. This power involves organizing some people with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals (Williams et al., 1994).

On the other hand, in the zero sum-game model, if a women gain power, its means men lost their power. So, some feminist writers on power have challenged the idea that power must necessarily involve domination by some, and obedience or oppression of others. Therefore, the non zero-sum model of power can be developed as an alternative to zero-sum game or power over (Oxaal and Baden, 1997).

However, this paper holds the idea of 'power within' as a type of non-zero-sum power. Many scholars have accounted varies indexes for power within. For example, Mosedale (2003) has mentioned self-esteem and self-confidence as the indexes of power within. Oxaal and Baden (1997) introduced self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. Charlier and Caubergs (2007) have stated four elements of power within i.e. self-awareness, self-esteem, identity and assertiveness. In summary, this study 'power within' is refers to how individuals through self-analysis and internal power can influence their lives and make changes. This study will be focusing on self-esteem and gender-awareness as indexes of power within.

Power within can be developed, enhanced and sharpened. This power would lead to individual empowerment. Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) can affect this power by helping women individually or collectively to gain ability, i.e. the power within. NGOs which are normally professionally-staffed organizations are able to reduce human suffering particularly in poor countries through some activities and functions such as funding projects, engaging in service provision and capacity building, contributing to awareness raising, promoting the self-organization of various groups (Baccaro, 2006).

In addition, Desai (2005) refers to some other roles and functions for NGOs such as counseling and support service, and awareness raising and advocacy. Many NGOs offer a range of different kinds of counseling and support, including guidance on marriage and divorce, and conflict management especially for young people, working to relieve stress, career guidance as well as counseling for single-parent families. From time to time based on NGO's report there are more funding available for awareness raising and information provision activities for poor people about equality, social justice, gender sensitivity, communal harmony, and human rights (Desai, 2005).

According to Haider & Aktar (1999), NGOs central goal is empowering the powerless women to discover their hidden potentialities, that is power of thought, power of word, and power of organization, with a view to helping them to participate in the socio-economic development for their emancipation from less human conditions to more human conditions (Islam and Sultana, 2005). Similarly, Ramesh (1996) asserts that NGOs promote the empowerment of the poor, particularly poor women through the awareness raising, capacity building, and training activities for group members (Baccaro, 2001, Desai, 2005). To conclude, such services provide ample avenue for participants to gain knowledge, to develop skills, and to advance experience, and subsequently developing their capacities and potentials, which later empower them.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in Shiraz, Iran. In this study, the G*power statistical analysis program developed by Erdfelder, Faul, and Buchner (1996) was used. To determine the proportion of each NGO in sample size, a sampling ratio technique was used. The women total population was 1950 and the sample based on G*power was 195, so the sampling ratio is $195/1950=.1$ or 10 percent. Then, the researcher draws the proportion of each NGO based on sample size. The selection of respondents using simple random sampling technique involved a number of steps. Firstly, a letter of permission and a complete list of names of women in NGOs were obtained from the NGOs' leaders. Then, with using the random number table given by Cooper & Schindler (2003), respondents selected from the each NGO and finally 195 women were selected from the list of 1950 population of all women NGOs in Shiraz. Data collection activity took place over a period of two months began in November and ended in December, 2009.

Basically, this study was approached quantitatively and qualitatively. To measure the power within and its indicators self-esteem and gender awareness survey technique with structured questionnaires were used. As mentioned earlier, these two variables (self-esteem and gender-awareness) are also the construct of power within. Self-esteem is referred to an individual's judgment of self-worth (Bandura, 1997). To measure of self-esteem, the study used 11 items based on five point likert scale on which they were to indicate whether items were 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' with a value of 1 from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree with value of 5. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha value of .821, indicating that it had a very high degree of reliability or internal consistency.

Meanwhile, gender awareness is referred to the recognition of gender knowledge that is shaped from the social structure and the experiences of all groups in society (Rowlands, 1997). It was measured by 10 items five point likert scale. Each of the item of the community awareness scale had a response category on a five point likert scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), 'neither agree nor disagree' (3), disagree (2), and 'strongly disagree' (1). Although some of the questions were asked in a reverse manner, the scores were adjusted accordingly. The total Scores of the scale is the combination of all ten (10) items ranged from 10 to 50. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha value of .746, indicating that it had a high degree of reliability or internal consistency.

On the other hand, to discover the NGO's functions and to categorize them based on their functions and activities, the researcher used in-depth interviews the NGOs' principals.

To measure the power within, items on self-esteem and gender-awareness have been computed and the score were categorized to three levels, i.e. low (72-83.6) medium (83.7-95.3) and high (95.4-107). To assess the normality distribution of data, the skewness and kurtosis of each variable were examined. The value of Skewness and Kurtosis of power within in this study was (-.32) and (.30). To answer the study objectives, this study employed descriptive statistic and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

4. Results of the study

This section depicts the results of the study, first describe the NGO's function, the second is revealing the scores of power within, and followed by the results of statistical analyses. The function of NGOs was acquired after in-depth interviewing with principals of NGOs, review the activities of NGOs and study of vision and mission. It was discovered there are four functions performed by the NGOs. However, the division of the function is not mutually, exclusively, this is due to some of the functions may be similar or overlap with each other. The functions include, developing individual ability, which two NGOs were classified under this function namely *Kimiyaye Salamate Pars* (Pars Prosperity Alchemy), and *Anjoman Omid* (Esperance Association); educational functions which five NGOs may be placed under this function, i.e., *Alzahra's Rahpooyan Charity*, *Anjoman Hami Khorshid* (Association of Sun Sponsor), *Mosharakate zenan nikokare Ryhane* (Reyhane Association) and *Hamyaran Salamat Ravan Ejtemaee (1&2)* (Helpers of Mental Health1&2); awareness building that conducted by two NGOs namely, *Anjomane Sibe Kal* (Unripe Apple Community) and *Naranan*; and mobilizing women to participate in projects in which two NGOs involved in this function, *Mosharakat Ejtemaee Banovane fars*, (Association of Women Participation) and *Moassesse Atiye (CBO)* (Atiye Community Based Organization).

4.1 The effect of NGOs' function

This study also examines the affect of NGO's function on development of power within among the women. In Shiraz, the NGO do performed some function such as developing individual ability, gaining educational provision, awareness building and mobilizing of people to participate in project to empower the women. This illustrates the NGOs initiative to build power within among women who participate in the activities organized by them, is similar to the one claimed by Ramesh (1996), Stromquist (1998) and the others as mentioned in earlier.

The first NGOs' function was to develop the individual ability through organizing some roles such as, raising self-esteem and develop ability of make decision among women. These two roles were carried out in activities such as holding educational classes regarding the family issues, increase women knowledge, consulting meeting and teaching life skills. The second NGOs' function was awareness building among the women. This was carried out by organizing educational class in different context, holding seminar, preparation the book and magazine, educational workshop, holding group discussion, and encouraging women to study. The third NGOs' function discovered in this study was the 'educational provision'. NGOs in Shiraz, have conducted programmes and activities to develop power within among the women through educational and counseling class, art-cultural education, teaching life skill, education of health issues, increase women knowledge, and religious and cultural activities. The last NGO's function was mobilizing of women to participate in programmes such as given the responsibility, explaining to them about the projects and its benefit, encourage women to participate, and giving them present to encourage woman to participate.

4.2 Individual scores of power within

As mentioned earlier, power within in this study included self-esteem and gender-awareness. The indicators of two variables, with mean scores and standard deviation and highest and lowest scores are as follow. The self-esteem item 'I feel bad because I don't understand any things' has highest mean ($M=4.22$, $SD= 1.02$). The lowest item among the indicators is 'I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life' ($M=3.66$, $SD=1.16$). The gender-awareness item that has highest mean 'It is important that women learn new things' ($M=4.58$, $SD=.55$), while the lowest is item 'Women have lower social status than men' ($M=2.45$, $SD= 1.31$).

Table 1 shows the frequency and mean scores of power within. The mean score of the power within among the respondents was 2.06 and standard deviation (SD) is around.55. The table also illustrates that 68.7% of respondents, are at the moderate level, followed by 19.0% at the high level. This indicates that the women who involved in NGOs have the moderate level of power within. This probably means that after joining NGOs, many of the respondents experienced empowerment, improved their sense of control over their own lives, raised their self-esteem, and increased their awareness. So, it can be concluded that women in Shiraz, Iran are at the medium level of power within and empowerment.

One-way ANOVA was used to assess the mean differences of power within among NGO's functions. NGO's function as depicted in Table2 was developing individual ability, educational functions, awareness building and mobilizing of women. The results of ANOVA test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean for NGO's functions among four groups ($F=3.55$, $P=.01$).

Furthermore, the post hoc multiple comparisons were selected to evaluate pair wise differences among mean score in NGO's functions. The result of Tukey test showed that the significant mean score difference existed between following pairs; developing individual ability and educational functions, and developing individual ability and awareness building. This test indicated the mean scores of developing individual ability ($M=92.48$, $SD=5.80$) was significantly higher than awareness building ($M=88.74$, $SD=5.87$). Developing individual ability also was significantly higher than educational function ($M=89.43$, $SD=6.86$). Table 3 shows these results.

The difference is due to the developing individual ability as an NGO's function in which constitute of some role and activities such as raising self-esteem and develop the ability of women to make decision, have been affect on power within and finally empower of the women in Shiraz. These results also supported by literatures which suggest NGO interventions have the positive contribute to women empowerment (AhsanUllah, 2003). This is because NGOs central goal is empowering the powerless women or helping them to exercise their hidden potentialities that is power of thought, power of word, and power of organization, with a view to helping them to participate in the socio economic development (Haider and Akhtar, 1999).

5. Conclusion

The concern of Gender and Development (GAD) theory is very much focus on gender relation, power relation and gender inequality. The main idea is about women empowerment (Singhal, 2003). Empowerment has been perceived and analyzed in different ways by many researchers. Because, there are different levels of power involved. As far as this study is concerned, it focuses only on power within.

The study revealed that the level of power within among the women in Shiraz is at the moderate level ($M= 2.06$). In Shiraz, the NGOs have played their functions in developing individual ability, educational functions, awareness building, and mobilizing of women. Among these four functions, the study discovered 'developing individual ability' among the members is more prominent. This means that, in general, the function of NGO by and large has developed the power within among the women. The functions are manifested in the activities initiated by the

NGOs, and to some degree these activities are relevant to the need for the women. As proven in this study when the participants felt that they have developed individual ability, awareness building, educational provision and mobilizing of women which denotes that they have developed capacities.

As noted earlier though the level of power within among women was at the moderate level, however, taking into account the socio-cultural background of the country which has been a large traditional practicing conservative way of live a male dominated social structure , a little change as experienced by the women shown in this study is a positive indication. Ideally, it also indicates that NGOs have played their function in developing the power within among the women through various activities that meet their needs. Based on this momentum, it is believed that these will be more power within develop among the women which ultimately has the potential to be develop as power to. Thus allowing more women to have more control over their life, i.e. the true empowerment will take place in future.

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Table 1. Level of power within among the women (n=195)

Levels	N	%	Mean	SD
Low (72-83.66)	24	12.3	90.48	6.29
Moderate (83.67-95.33)	134	68.7		
High (95.34-107)	37	19.0		

Table 2. One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of NGO's functions and its Scores

Functions	No of NGOs	No of respondents	Mean	SD	F	P	η^2
Mobilizing women	3	60	90.44	5.94	3.55	.01	.057
Educational functions	3	55	89.43	6.86			
Awareness building	2	35	88.74	5.87			
Developing individual ability	3	45	92.48	5.80			

Table 3. Result of post hoc comparison of power within and NGO's functions

Dependent variable	(I) NGO's functions	(J) NGO's functions	Mean difference	Sig
Power within	Mobilizing people	Educational functions	1.00	.84
		Awareness building	1.70	.61
		Developing individual ability	-2.03	.34
	Educational functions	Mobilizing people	-1.00	.84
		Awareness building	.69	.95
		Developing individual ability	-3.04*	.04
	Awareness building	Mobilizing people	-1.70	.61
		Educational functions	-.69	.95
		Developing individual ability	-3.74*	.02
	Developing individual ability	Mobilizing people	2.03	.34
		Educational functions	3.04*	.04
		Awareness building	3.74*	.02

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.