

Article type:
Original Research

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The Relationship Between Modern Managerial Processes in Social Work and the Dimensions of Empowerment Among Divorced Women

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to determine the relationship between the new management processes of the social work structure and the empowerment of divorced women, based on the study community of Dehloran city.

Methods and Materials: The research method was applied and included in the descriptive and correlational research. The statistical population consisted of all divorced women headed by households covered by welfare in Dehloran city, 120 people in 1402. The sample size of 92 people was selected based on the Morgan table sampling method. The sampling method in the present study was non-random. Information was collected by the questionnaires of modern management processes by Farjad et al. and women's empowerment by Gupta and Srivastava. The data were analyzed in the descriptive section by the mean and standard deviation, and in the inferential section by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, Pearson correlation coefficient, and multivariate regression.

Findings: The results showed that there is a significant relationship between new management processes of social work and empowerment of divorced women in Dehloran city, and new management processes of social work have a significant relationship with decision-making, access to other resources, women's mobility, social work, and gender awareness of divorced women in Dehloran city.

Conclusion: According to the findings, it can be concluded that new management processes in the structure of social work can affect empowerment and its dimensions in divorced women. As a result, it is suggested that social work should benefit from promoting new management processes in order to improve empowerment in divorced women.

Keywords: Empowerment, divorced women, management processes, social work.

Article history:

Received 21 Feb 2025

Revised 14 May 2025

Accepted 24 June 2025

Published online 01 Dec 2025

How to cite this article:

Momeni, S., & Ghojavand, GH. (2025). The Relationship Between Modern Managerial Processes in Social Work and the Dimensions of Empowerment Among Divorced Women. *International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture*, 12(9), 234-240.



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Introduction

Divorce is a common phenomenon in contemporary societies, but for several reasons, it ranks high among public health policy concerns (Khataybeh, 2022). First, within the scope of etiological research on daily stress events, divorce remains one of the most significant life events during adulthood (Cohen et al., 2016; Freeman et al., 2008). Second, from a health perspective, the experience of divorce, like other major stressful life events, is associated with an increased risk of both physical and mental illnesses. Numerous studies have shown that it negatively affects the overall physical and mental well-being of those involved (Cohen et al., 1997; Nielsen et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals who experience the breakdown of marital life through divorce report higher levels of psychological stress (Nielsen et al., 2008), physical exhaustion (Rote, 2017), and a higher risk of hospitalization due to infectious diseases (Nielsen et al., 2016).

In most industrialized societies, the divorce rate has hovered around 40 to 50 percent over the past two decades, showing a significant increase compared to previous periods (Control & Prevention, 2016). In recent years, Iran has also witnessed a rising trend of divorce across all provinces (Fakhri et al., 2018). According to official statistics, the rate of divorce in Iran increased significantly from 2008 to 2018. In 2008, there was one divorce for every eight marriages, while by 2018, this figure had risen to one in every three marriages (Asghari et al., 2023).

With the emergence of new approaches in development and gender and the adoption of policies aimed at improving core functions and enhancing the capabilities of women, the fundamental concept of women's empowerment has been increasingly emphasized. The United Nations Development Programme has identified promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the key objectives of the Millennium Declaration (Group, 2014).

Sen et al., (2023) define women's empowerment as a process through which women become capable of organizing themselves, increasing their self-confidence, defending their rights to make independent choices and gain control over resources, ultimately eliminating their subordinate status (Malhotra et al., 2024). Undoubtedly, modern managerial processes within the structure of

social work—which divorced or single mothers as clients rely on—can play a crucial role in empowering women. Management in social work is a process that encompasses planning, seeking, supporting, and overseeing services provided by various social organizations or healthcare institutions on behalf of clients. This process enables social workers to coordinate efforts across different organizations to deliver a broad range of professional team-based services to the client. Case management reduces problems by streamlining services, managing financial flows, and ensuring proper coordination among service providers. It can be implemented within large organizations, social programs, or even at the family level (Foroughzadeh & Teymori, 2025).

A quick glance at the status of women in Iran reveals their significant presence: they constitute 49% of the total population, 48% of students from elementary to high school, and yet, their economic participation remains low (with an activity rate of 13.1% among women aged 15 and over, and an unemployment rate of 31.1% among female university graduates) (Organization, 2017). The lack of female participation in economic and social activities, the presence of large numbers of women below the poverty line, low self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as limited access to labor market information, vocational training, labor laws, and workplace conditions, are among the key issues affecting women (Organization, 2017).

The province of Ilam has a population of 557,599, with women making up 275,131 of that number (approximately 49.34%), including 108,166 women aged 15 and over (Statistical Yearbook of Ilam Province, 2016). However, their labor force participation rate was just 13% in 2016 (Statistical Center of Iran, 2016). Given the province's demographics and the large share of women in the population, this level of participation is quite low. Many of women's psychological, social, political, and economic needs are deeply connected to this issue. Neglecting women's fundamental issues and relegating them to secondary status results in irreparable harm to society.

Among the various female groups in Dehloran city, one significant and vulnerable group comprises divorced women who are heads of households. These women—often among the poorest segments of society—are supported by organizations such as the Imam Khomeini

Relief Foundation and the Welfare Organization, yet they face numerous challenges. In recent years, their numbers have grown due to various reasons such as divorce and remaining unmarried. Many of these women live in extreme poverty and receive minimal stipends and assistance. This places their families at serious risk of psychological harm, increased crime rates, and other social dangers in the absence of adequate support. Historically, empowerment programs for these women in Dehloran have followed a traditional microcredit model, but most participants have not achieved meaningful success or self-sufficiency. The shortcomings of traditional empowerment strategies are evident, particularly in their failure to effectively support divorced female heads of households seeking economic independence.

This study seeks to offer a new model for empowering female-headed households through a thematic interpretive approach. In light of the issues discussed, this research aims to answer the central question: Is there a significant relationship between modern managerial processes in social work and the empowerment of divorced women in Dehloran city?

Methods and Materials

Study Design

The present study is applied in nature and falls within the category of descriptive and correlational research. The statistical population included all divorced women who were heads of households and under the support of the Welfare Organization in Dehloran city in 2023 (1402 in the Iranian calendar), totaling 120 individuals. A sample of 92 participants was selected based on Morgan's sampling table, using a 5% margin of error. The sampling method employed in this research was non-random and based on convenience sampling.

After the research proposal was approved and the necessary coordination was made with the Welfare Organization of Dehloran County, the researcher—who was employed by the Welfare Organization—had access to the case files of women heads of households. After reviewing the files, the researcher contacted eligible participants via phone and invited them to participate in the study. A total of 92 women agreed to take part. They were then provided with two questionnaires: one on women's empowerment and the other on modern

managerial processes. After the researcher explained the objectives of the study, participants were asked to respond to all items carefully and honestly. All questionnaires were collected over a 26-day period and prepared for analysis.

Instruments

Women's Empowerment Questionnaire: Designed and validated by Gupta & Srivastava, (2012), this questionnaire consists of 37 closed-ended items rated on a five-point Likert scale. It measures dimensions such as decision-making, access and control over resources, mobility, safety, and gender awareness. The questionnaire was validated in Iran by (Karimi et al., 2022). The Likert scale ranges from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much" (5). Scores between 37 and 74 indicate low empowerment, 74 to 148 reflect a moderate level, and scores above 148 signify a high level of empowerment. The reliability coefficients reported in (Karimi et al., 2022) study for each subscale were: Decision-making participation: 0.83, Access to resources: 0.79, Mobility: 0.85, Safety: 0.74 and Gender awareness: 0.86. Content validity was confirmed by academic advisors and subject matter experts based on clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research questions. Confirmatory factor analysis also supported the construct validity of the instrument.

Modern Managerial Processes Questionnaire: This standardized instrument was developed by (Farjad et al., 2015) to measure the implementation level of New Public Management (NPM) in public and private organizations. It includes five dimensions: decentralization, downsizing, managerialism, debureaucratization, and privatization. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very low" (1) to "Very high" (5). Farjad et al., (2015) reported reliability coefficients above 0.70 for each dimension and the overall scale. Validity was confirmed through construct and convergent validity analyses.

Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in two sections: descriptive and inferential statistics. In the descriptive section, measures such as mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution tables, variance, standard error, and statistical tables were used. In the inferential section, the normality of data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. To analyze the research hypotheses,

Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were employed using SPSS software version 22.

This section addresses the demographic characteristics of the sample, specifically age and education.

Findings and Results

Demographic Information of Participants

Table 1

Sample Description by Age

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	92	100%	100%
Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
20	1	1.1%	1.1%
21-30	11	11.96%	13.06%
31-40	35	38.04%	51.10%
41-50	27	29.35%	80.45%
51-60	12	13.04%	93.49%
61+	6	6.51%	100%
Total	92	100%	

Table 2

Sample Description by Educational Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below Diploma	45	48.91%	48.91%
Diploma	37	40.22%	89.13%
Bachelor's Degree	10	10.87%	100%
Total	92	100%	

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics – Mean and Standard Deviation of Study Variables

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	Standard Deviation
Modern Public Management	-0.576	0.426	84.33	23.927
Decision-making	0.620	0.720	15.63	4.019
Access to Other Resources	0.459	1.058	13.83	3.772
Mobility	-0.156	0.203	16.66	2.470
Safety	-0.806	0.925	18.40	3.829
Gender Awareness	0.491	0.394	19.81	4.744
Empowerment of Divorced Women	-0.632	1.260	49.50	11.504

As seen in Table 3, the descriptive statistics for the variables of modern public management and empowerment of divorced women are presented, including skewness, kurtosis, mean, and standard deviation. Since skewness and kurtosis values fall between ± 2 , the data is normally distributed at the 0.05

significance level. There is a significant relationship between modern managerial processes in social work and the empowerment of divorced women. A stepwise regression analysis was performed, starting with the inclusion of the independent variable (modern public management) in the regression equation.

Table 4

Summary of Regression – Predictor Variables on the Empowerment of Divorced Women

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.587	0.344	0.370	1.002

As shown in Table 4, the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.587, and the adjusted R-squared value is 0.370, indicating that 37% of the variance in the criterion

variable (women's empowerment) is explained by the predictor variable.

Table 5

ANOVA – Significance of Regression and Correlation for Empowerment of Divorced Women

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	1480.537	1	1480.537	144.147	0.001
Residual	924.453	90	10.271		
Total	3572.990	91			

As seen in Table 5, the F value is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the correlation and regression between the predictor and

criterion variables are statistically meaningful: $F(1,91) = 144.147, p < 0.05$.

Table 6

Final Predictor Variables in Stepwise Regression for Empowerment of Divorced Women

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	p
(Constant)	-2.457	1.498		-1.640	0.104
Modern Managerial Processes	0.581	0.027	0.470	21.617	0.001

The regression coefficients shown in Table 6 indicate the contribution of each predictor variable to the criterion variable. The resulting regression equation is:

$$Y = 0.581 \times (X_1) - 2.457$$

Where Y = Empowerment of divorced women; X_1 = Modern managerial processes in social work.

Discussion and Conclusion

The evaluation of the research hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between modern managerial processes in social work and the empowerment of divorced women in Dehloran city—across dimensions such as decision-making participation, access to resources, mobility, safety, and gender awareness. Therefore, the research hypothesis was confirmed. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of (Browne, 1995; Cox & Parsons, 1996; Dadparvar & Nasiri, 2024; Gerami, 2024; Han et al., 2019; JUDITH, 1996; Rajabpour Azizi et al.; Sadeghi et al., 2025; Singh, 2018).

In interpreting these findings, it can be stated that workplace discrimination remains widespread in Iranian society. A large percentage of women report moderate to high levels of discrimination, particularly in household labor, recruitment processes, and unequal job opportunities between men and women. Gendered job

segregation is another commonly cited form of discrimination. Eliminating traditional beliefs is crucial to empowering women—especially those beliefs surrounding gender roles that have long been ingrained in the culture. Many women in the study opposed these traditional beliefs, and the stronger this opposition, the greater their empowerment. This underscores the importance of fostering modern and progressive mindsets in management to support women's empowerment.

Social work and social service management—being practical, applied professions with a strong grounding in both theory and practice—are closely connected with various social groups and have a deep understanding of their needs and challenges. These professions must play a prominent role in designing and implementing policies and require the enhancement of modern managerial processes. Traditional managerial models in social work often created a circular relationship between support institutions and female-headed households. Under such frameworks, institutions either independently or through memoranda of understanding with governmental, non-governmental, or grassroots organizations (mostly for financial or vocational training support) provided limited facilities and services such as vocational counseling and small loans, as well as

dependency-driven assistance (e.g., monthly stipends, health insurance, food baskets, etc.), without assuming full responsibility for the entirety of empowerment programs.

Consequently, even when women engaged in economic activities by utilizing these limited facilities—producing goods or services—the support model failed to address critical missing elements like market access, business sustainability, or the long-term viability of economic projects. These missing links led to the failure of many empowerment programs, resulting in a return to poverty and mounting debt, forcing women to re-apply for institutional support, often in worse conditions.

Experts argue that creating a new empowerment model requires breaking the circular structure and replacing it with a triangular interaction model among: Support Institutions, Female-headed households, and Previously missing links (market access, capacity building, sustainability, etc.). This model comprehensively considers the five core factors impacting empowerment—decision-making participation, access to resources, mobility, safety, and gender awareness. According to this new model, a structured synergy must be created around the design and operational needs of empowerment programs, based on the following four key actors: First Actor: The Policy-maker and supervisory body overseeing the strategic management of empowerment programs for female-headed households. Second Actor: Support institutions such as the Welfare Organization or Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, acting as program implementers. Third Actor: Financial providers, including banks, microfinance institutions, charities, and savings and loan funds. Fourth Actor: Supporters of female-headed households, such as NGOs, employment-focused charities, governmental and non-governmental institutions, and individual or corporate sponsors.

This newly proposed model for women's empowerment not only promotes synergy among governmental and non-governmental actors but also addresses the fourth actor—a critical gap in previous programs. To implement this inter-organizational synergy, each participating organization should have clearly defined duties and be committed to fulfilling them. In this framework: The first actor (policy-maker)—often the Department of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare—plays a key role in identifying job opportunities based on local advantages, understanding

household economic conditions, and matching women's skill profiles with market demands. This department is responsible for defining employment strategies, creating local job ecosystems, and policy supervision. In the present study, this department appears to have the capability and credibility to act as the lead policy-maker for defining and supporting home-based or small-scale businesses tailored for female-headed households. The second actor, support institutions (e.g., the Welfare Organization and Imam Khomeini Relief Committee), function as the implementers of these new empowerment models through home-based or family entrepreneurship initiatives. These institutions should first identify skilled women and match them with suitable employment sectors that have backing (financial or otherwise), then guide and refer them to the third actor (banks, financial institutions, NGOs) for resources.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude and appreciation to all participants.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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