


## Article

# The Empowerment of Saudi Arabian Women through a Multidimensional Approach: The Mediating Roles of Self-Efficacy and Family Support

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**Abstract:** Globally, the empowerment of women is a critical and challenging issue. In considering the problem, the researchers sought to investigate Women's Empowerment (WE) in the context of Saudi Arabia. In this study the researchers applied quantitative methods and collected the cross-sectional data through a questionnaire based on a random sampling technique. The study utilized 314 useable samples to conclude the investigation. Using path analysis through Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 26.0, the study underlines a positive and significant effect of Economic Empowerment (EE) and Social Empowerment (SE) on WE. On the other hand, Political Empowerment (PE) has a negative effect on WE. Moreover, Self-efficacy (SFY) and Family Support (FS) also positively and significantly affect WE. Regarding the mediating effects, SFY mediates the positive relationship of EE and SE with WE. On the contrary, SFY did not develop a positive relationship between PE and WE. Finally, FS plays a crucial mediating role in developing the association between EE, SE, PE and WE among Saudi Arabian women. This study's findings support policymakers and planners in developing policies and strategies to boost WE significantly. Finally, through the empirical confirmation between EE, SE, PE, SFY, FS and WE in Saudi Arabia, a Middle East country, this study's findings add further enrichment to the depth of the literature.

**Keywords:** women empowerment (WE); economic empowerment (EE); social empowerment (SE); political empowerment (PE); self-efficacy (SFY); family support (FS)



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## 1. Introduction and Background

Women's Empowerment (WE) is one of the furthestmost critical challenges and concerns of the 21st century. This is because WE is the process of uplifting women's economic, social, political and cultural status and, more particularly, women who are deprived in society [1]. Women have the capacity and ability to change and revolutionize their families and, in doing so, the Saudi Arabian economy. However, for many years Saudi Arabian women have faced many challenges culturally, economically, academically, and in the field of employment. One must understand that social welfare policies dictate that women lack power if they lack money, income, or accessibility to essential resources [2].

For many years, Saudi Arabian women have faced a challenge of inequality and discrimination. However, with resilience and determination Saudi Arabian women have fought for their rights and empowerment, and great strides have been made to see WE from an economic perspective. Over the past few decades, Saudi Arabian women have caught up with the freedom to have access to education and become involved in the labor market and, thereby, become part of the 2030 vision for Saudi Arabia. Moreover, they have been given opportunities to participate in top ranking positions in the Saudi Arabian Government and in the country's private sector. The Saudi Arabian Government has also

initiated many programs to empower women in terms of entrepreneurship, their rights, and public participation to see Saudi Arabia as a great nation. In addition, the Saudi Arabian Government's reforms in bylaws and legislation have catapulted women's growth and involvement in the country. The years-long efforts to change legislation and give women opportunities to serve, work and practice their duties with freedom have borne fruit. There is greater hope for Saudi Arabian women, but still more needs to be done [2,3].

Saudi Arabia's economy needs women's involvement and efforts to fully unlock its potential, and to gain the competitive edge in both the country's oil business and other economic activities if the 2030 vision is to be achieved [4]. The issue of WE is at the forefront with women's rights being taken seriously. Recently, the Saudi Arabian Government realized the potential of women, and their empowerment has become a prerequisite in agendas to achieve the 2030 vision. Through regulations, policies, and legislation, Saudi Arabian women have been given the rights to participate in all sectors of the economy. Women's involvement in the public domain, economy, and employment sector (both in the Government and private sectors) has been seen as a revolution in fighting poverty and in boosting Saudi Arabia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [2].

Turning to wages, there are huge variations between industries, gender, and occupations. By comparison, 77.8% of the men are employed compared with 20.2% of women. Many Saudi Arabian women are educated and have the relevant skills for the jobs market; however, their employment and working environment still hinders their performance, work and effectiveness in delivering services. According to the *Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016* there were, in 2015, approximately 13.5 million Saudi Arabian women. Out of the population of women, around 9 million could be classified as of working age. However, only 20.2% of working age women were employed and this trend seems to persist where the female labor force is still deficient [4].

Consequently, the literature provides the straight path that developing the economy and society is impossible without empowering women. Therefore, the examination of WE is a need of the day because women face significant challenges regarding their empowerment, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Thus, we developed the following questions:

What are the factors that create empowerment among women in Saudi Arabia?

How do SFY and FS help develop the association of EE, SE and PE empowerment with WE?

In this regard, this study intends to investigate the empowerment domains in terms of economic, social, and political attitudes towards Saudi Arabian WE. In addition, the study aims to examine the roles of Self-Efficacy (SFY) and Family Support (FS) in developing among Saudi Arabian women the relationships between EE, SE and PE.

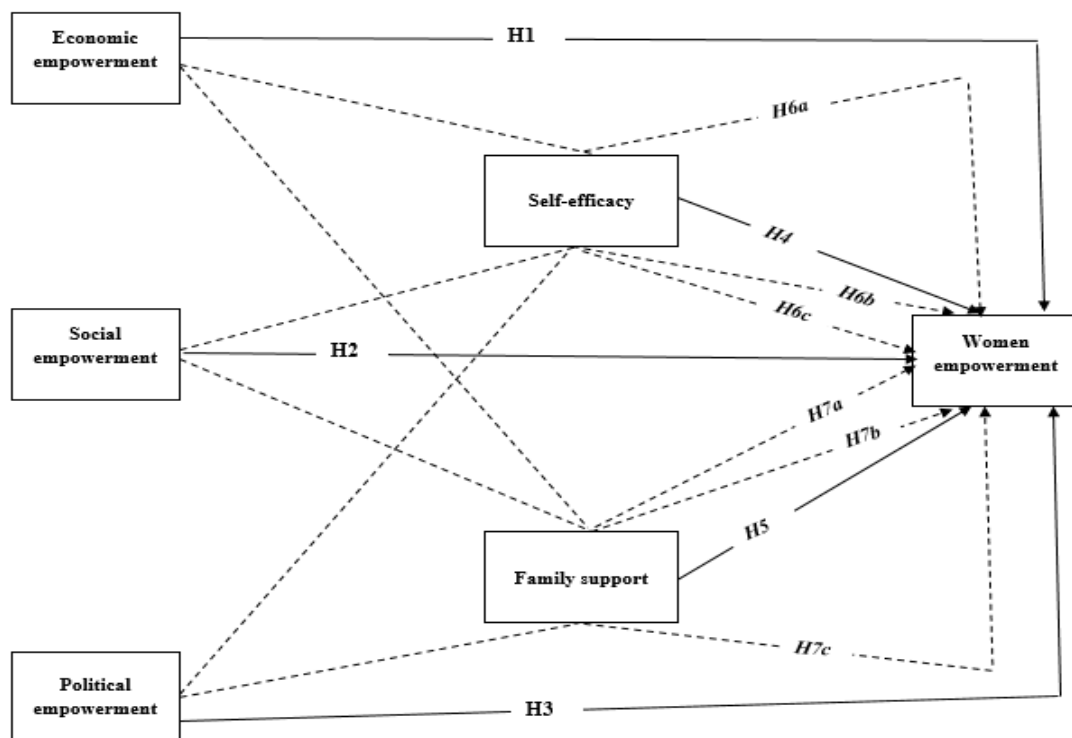
## 2. Literature Review and Development of the Hypotheses

The development of the economy and society is possible through WE [5]. In the literature, several scholars have examined the different factors which affect WE. Among Emirati medical professionals, Ref. [6]'s findings demonstrate the meaningful role of the legal and institutional system, HRM policies and ethical environment in predicting WE. Similarly, proactive behaviors are robust constructs that affect the psychology of WE and entrepreneurial success [7]. In Botswana, female entrepreneurs are confronted by the significant problems of training and development, and customized entrepreneurship education opportunities to improve their knowledge and technical skills [8]. In Uttar Pradesh, India, PE, economic development, upgrading in family matters and pronouncement to use public amenities significantly improve WE due to their involvement in self-help groups [9]. According to [10], from an Islamic perspective, socio-economic constructs affect WE and reduce family poverty both directly and indirectly.

Among Egyptian women, their economic resources, as represented by their employment standing, are a valuable source of empowerment and local social context. On the other hand, education is not found to play a positive role in the awareness and conver-

sational ideas concerning gender roles [11]. The results of Ref. [12]’s semi-structured interviews underscore the internet’s significant role on Tehrani women’s economic lives. These factors enable them to become involved in new types of online corporate activities. Similarly, Ref. [13]’s findings show that there is a positive association between empowerment through self-help groups and micro-entrepreneurship. Among IT women managers, PE, in terms of FS, awareness, family environment and legal environment significantly promote such women’s motivations [14]. Likewise, Ref. [15]’s meta-analysis exposes the positive role played by microfinance services in promoting women’s entrepreneurship. The community-level arrangements shape women’s agencies to access and use loans and undertake entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, eventually, EE exists. Among African American women leaders, diverse ideas and experiences in the workplace enhance leadership and empowerment, and Refs. [16,17]’s findings demonstrates that the theory of economic modernity rings true for WE since financial independence through cooperation has assisted women in gaining control over resources and has led to WE. In Bogotá, Colombia, the increase in women’s capacity to make decisions about allocating resources and time management are due to informal entrepreneurship [18]. The factors such as expenditure, savings, household income and human capital formation significantly enhance all three dimensions of empowerment, namely EE, familial empowerment, and socio-cultural empowerment. These factors contribute to overall WE [19]. In Middle Eastern countries, other factors such as family, Islamic work ethic, and national governments, affect their citizens’ empowerment. In addition, the stimulus of rulers’ leadership and the initiatives in balancing work/life commitments affect WE [20]. In European fisheries areas, Fisheries Local Action Groups actively support women in diversification activities. However, WE is complex and varies in areas where interventional programs contribute significantly to recognizing gender issues in fisheries [21]. In a similar direction, Ref. [22]’s study findings indicate that there are positive and significant spatial spillovers arising from women’s PE in neighboring European countries. Besides, there is a positive effect on female PE in European countries’ welfare policies. In Pakistan’s Balochistan province, women face socio-cultural and economic obstacles and are confined mainly to household tasks. Society does not permit them to leave home without a male companion and to gain an education. Moreover, Balochi women are confronted by the complexities of their social lives and remain unaware of the overall scenarios of being in human society [23]. In Tajikistan, in the context of a growing economic local capitalist economy, international donors’ funding enhances WE initiatives and fosters women’s responsibilities and self-reliance [24]. In modern states, women’s political rights have increased where women constitute half of the population. However, unfortunately, overall total resource rent per capita has a negatively effect on the women’s PE. There are also large differences in the resource profusion of women’s PE because this depends on the quality of the country’s institutions. It is noted also that female employment in the exchangeable service and manufacturing sectors has led to greater gender inequality in primary and secondary education [25]. Despite EE being recognized overall as a significant contributor, Iranian sanctions on WE have a severe negative effect on the socio-economic, political, and psychological aspects of WE, which has resulted in the vulnerability of empowerment [26].

Consequently, the above literature provides evidence of the positive effect of the empowerment dimensions, namely EE, SE and PE, on WP [27–30]. It also offers the predictive power of SFY and FS on WE [14,31–36]. Furthermore, in mediation, several factors such as economic growth, technical knowledge and training, social capital, entrepreneurial orientation, self-confidence, entrepreneurs’ performance, education, employees’ creativity, self-esteem and entrepreneurial intention, etc., have confirmed the mediating effect of these constructs on WE [37–41]. However, the literature still lacks evidence of EE’s, PE’s and SE’s direct relationships with WE in the mediation of SFY and FS. Therefore, the researchers realized that there was such a need in the context of Saudi Arabian women, and therefore we developed Figure 1 below to confirm it among women.



**Figure 1.** This Study's Conceptual Model. (Source: Developed by the researchers).

### 2.1. Empowerment Dimensions and Women Empowerment (WE)

The social, political, economic, and psychological dimensions of empowerment have played a pivotal role in strengthening and empowering women in every society [13,42]. From an economic viewpoint, savings, household income and capital formation enhance familial empowerment, socio-cultural empowerment, and EE [19]. Ref. [43]'s findings posit that microfinance plays a considerable and valuable role in WE.

SE focuses on the individual's process of evolving a sense of autonomy and self-confidence to modify social associations [30]. Social mobility and independence are touchstones of SE at the individual level. Women's SE can be increased through the stimulation of entrepreneurship [44]. The researchers, such as [28,44–46], highlight that the societal factors such as community, organization, society, family, and government, play a significant role in strengthening WE. Moreover, these factors meaningfully affect employment and women's experiences of participation in workforce dynamics.

PE points out the process of transporting several elements of power to those who do not possess it, so that they can participate in political activities and make democratic decisions [30]. Politically, WE can be observed as awareness and power to act according to women's rights and rightful roles. To achieve women's PE, there is a pressing need to create participation in political activity, membership of parties, political awareness, and situations of power. In such a way, women become aware of the political aspects and are involved in political affairs. Better communication, greater mobility and advanced networking empower women [42]. Ref. [47] believe that social pressure may adjust the woman's power in their households' decision-making. Amplified depictions of women in local government, such as involvement in voting, politics, and informal organizations to resolve community issues, are the constructive features that lead to more WE [48].

In entrepreneurship and business women's PE is fragile, with only a small number of investigations positing such a connection. Parenthetically, Ref. [27] observed that compared to non-entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs display a meaningfully higher propensity to vote. Ref. [29] posits that women who actively engage in political activities participate more in businesses and show from their experience of entrepreneurship a greater level of movement in, and an acute awareness of, political curtailment. Culture, social norms, and

legal and regulatory frameworks substantially affect WE [49]. Moreover, social attitudes and decision-making contribute significantly to WE [42]. According to the findings of Ref. [50]’s empirical survey, participation in major household decisions, ability to make a purchase, mobility, economic security, family, and legal and political awareness improve WE. By using the item response theory, Ref. [51] recommends that credit programs lead women to take a more significant role in household decision-making. WE is enhanced significantly by better access to economic and financial resources, sufficient social networks, bargaining power and freedom of mobility. WE can be explained by assigning authority and power to make decisions in every part of our daily lives. These decisions comprise social, economic, political and household levels [52].

In developing countries, WE is nowadays one of the most discussed issues worldwide. However, in the context of Saudi Arabia (Saudi), there remains a serious need for more evidence to fill the gap in the existing literature. Therefore, the researchers formulated the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Economic Empowerment (EE) positively and significantly boosts Women Empowerment (WE).*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Social Empowerment (SE) positively and significantly boosts Women Empowerment (WE).*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Political Empowerment (PE) positively and significantly boosts Women Empowerment (WE).*

## 2.2. Self-Efficacy (SFY) and Women Empowerment (WE)

SFY is one of several conceivable measures of ‘psychological empowerment’ [53,54], which emphasize an individual’s ability to control their emotions and behavior. SFY is the women’s inner drive and determination to succeed, since it is the ability or efficacy to deal with multiple tasks through self-confidence [55]. Therefore, the development of SFY among individuals is more important to control biases and to develop their perceived career options. Women with high levels of SFY are more likely to take on more challenging responsibilities and be content with the idea of greater empowerment [56,57]. From an entrepreneurship perspective, SFY, which is one of the crucial elements of entrepreneurial intentions [31,58], is associated with an individual’s belief to accomplish the proposed goals [59]. Ref. [36] suggests that SFY helps with the smooth running of the business. It offers the frameworks for sustainable economic development and promotes entrepreneurial activities [31]. According to [34], financial capabilities, social capital, and women’s SFY enhance the WE through developing socioeconomic wellbeing and achieving sustainable development goals. Likewise, Ref. [35]’s study findings show that, SFY and self-esteem are the most dominant and strongest predictors of WE in Saudi Arabia’s administrative and academic staff. Similarly, financial coping behaviors and SFY are significant analysts of the growth of EE and wellbeing among Saudi women [60]. Therefore, the researchers formulated the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *Self-Efficacy (SFY) positively and significantly boosts Women Empowerment (WE).*

## 2.3. Family Support (FS) and Women Empowerment (WE)

The family plays a crucial role in WE since it can promote innovation, business, and social and economic wealth in a country’s economy. According to [61], families’ continuous support is a substantial help in addressing their children’s needs. The factors such as SFY and FS robustly develop the women’s motivations and intentions to initiate their businesses and entrepreneurial activities [62]. Similarly, Ref. [63]’s findings demonstrate that among the students of technical, business, and financial universities education, entrepreneurial competence and education, FS significantly contributes to developing business decisions

to empower women in entrepreneurial or business matters. Turning to the employment of women in rural areas, factors such as FS, freedom of mobility and decision-making are positively and significantly associated with WE [64].

In Middle Eastern countries, Ref. [20]'s empirical insightfulness underlines a predictive precision of leadership support and government support on WE. In addition, family capital and business ethics make a significant contribution to WE. In Saudi Arabia, WE improves economic growth in the long term [65]. The economic growth is supported by FS and empowers the creation of self-employment opportunities. Knowledge and technical education are possible among women through FS [33]. In the social and cultural context, Ref. [32]'s findings support the positive roles of self-esteem, where the husband's support and social support have a psychological effect on WE. The constructs, such as family environment, FS, legal and political environment, awareness of information and internal motivation significantly improve PE [14]. Therefore, the researchers formulated the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5 (H5).** *Family Support (FS) positively and significantly boosts Women Empowerment (WE).*

#### 2.4. The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy (SFY)

It is necessary to drive economic development to alleviate poverty among women. The social capital and entrepreneurial orientation are positively associated either through SFY or mediated by SFY. Women intend to become involved in economic activities and become entrepreneurs through SFY and self-confidence [40]. According to [39], SFY mediates the relationship between personal factors and women's entrepreneurial performance. In other words, women entrepreneurs' performance is high when their SFY is high. Similarly, self-esteem and income fully mediate the association between education and WE. Education is essential to boost WE through generating revenue and self-esteem [38]. Ref. [41]'s findings indicate that SFY mediates a positive and significant relationship between employees' creativity and their entrepreneurial intentions. Women who are greatly empowered have stronger SFY and beliefs [66]. The findings of Ref. [67]'s empirical study underline the mediating contributions made by individuals' SFY perceptions between psychological empowerment and well-being at work. Among African American women, the relationship between SFY and attempted suicides is highlighted partially by the mediating role of perceived social support. The involvement in raising abused women's SFY should enhance their capacities to obtain material and social resources [68]. Ref. [69]'s findings show firmly that there is a positive and significant correlation between employees' psychological empowerment and their proactive behaviors. SFY is the crucial factor which mediates these relationships. By employing social cognitive theory among female entrepreneurs, SFY is a potent and convenient mediator in developing the associations between formal institutional support and venture performance [36]. The result of Ref. [1]'s parsimonious work underlines that SFY has a meaningful and significant effect on women's position in the family, participation in social activities and social protection of WE in rural areas. This study's findings also show that there is a negative and significant association between cultural barriers and WE in rural areas. Moreover, SFY and self-esteem play a mediating role in shaping the relationship between socio-cultural factors and WE in rural areas. Similarly, creative SFY mediates the positive path between team-member exchanges and members' innovative work behaviors [70]. Therefore, the researchers formulated the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 6a (H6a).** *Self-efficacy (SFY) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Economic Empowerment (EE) and Women Empowerment (WE).*

**Hypothesis 6b (H6b).** *Self-efficacy (SFY) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Social Empowerment (SE) and Women Empowerment (WE).*

**Hypothesis 6c (H6c).** *Self-efficacy (SFY) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Political Empowerment (PE) and Women Empowerment (WE).*

### 2.5. The Mediating Role of Family Support (FS)

Psychological empowerment mediates the positive relationship between international intrapreneurship and transformational leadership [71]. Empowerment has a substantial role in mediating the association between job satisfaction and work flexibility, which ultimately leads to improvement in lower turnover intentions [72]. According to Ref. [73]'s empirical evidence there is a positive correlation between the level of awareness, internal motivations, and political orientations and either WE or the mediation of WE. Similarly, employee performance is the significant mediator between years of service, age, sex, education, and the number of families and WE [74]. From Ref. [75]'s insights, psychological empowerment mediates the association between affective commitment and structural empowerment. Ref. [76]'s findings support the mediating role by depicting psychological empowerment's mediating impact between innovative work behaviors and knowledge sharing. Likewise, employee attitudes and transformational leadership are positively associated with the mediation of psychological empowerment [77]. Ref. [78]'s seminal work demonstrates management trustworthiness' mediating contribution in the association between commitment and empowerment. Ref. [79]'s findings show that there is a positive correlation between perceived social support in the family dimension and perceived organizational support among women teachers. Further, there is a positive correlation between turnover intentions and perceived corporate support and job satisfaction [80]. The outcomes suggest a partial mediation of psychological empowerment between empowering leadership and employees' general mental health [81]. Family empowerment mediates the association between positive changes in dealing with problem behaviors and family-centered care [82]. Consequently, the literature supports the predictive and mediating role in developing the association between economic, social, political, leadership and job satisfaction, organizational support, innovative work behaviors, knowledge sharing, political orientation, employee performance and commitment, etc., and WE [71,73–75,81]. However, despite its significant role in WE, in the context of Saudi Arabia, FS' mediating role is still in its infancy. Therefore, the researchers formulated the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 7a (H7a).** *Family support (FS) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Economic Empowerment (EE) and Women Empowerment (WE).*

**Hypothesis 7b (H7b).** *Family support (FS) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Social Empowerment (SE) and Women Empowerment (WE).*

**Hypothesis 7c (H7c).** *Family support (FS) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Political Empowerment (PE) and Women Empowerment (WE).*

## 3. Research Methods

### 3.1. Approach

In this study, the researchers investigate WE through different empowerment dimensions, namely, SFY and FS. Therefore, the study involves attitudes and behavioral responses. In this regard, the researchers chose to conduct quantitative research because it provides valuable insights to the ordering of reality and the materialized homilies and mitigation of personal bias [83]. This type of approach assists in reducing the risk in terms of finance and time. The evaluation of its findings offers availability, integrity, and confidentiality [84].

Furthermore, the questionnaire uses the five-point Likert scale to provide a reasonably robust basis which has been verified to be reliable over a wide variety of forms along with such matters as the item content of scales related to their construct validity [85]. In support of this method, several scholars have conducted quantitative studies in WE [37–41]. Therefore, the researchers chose to use a quantitative approach in this study.

### 3.2. Respondents and Data Collection

WE remains a challenge in Saudi Arabia, despite some policies and legislation encouraging WE and employment in the achievement of the country's 2030 vision. The researchers targeted individual women who were working in the top management positions in several segments of Saudi Arabia's public and private enterprises. We tried to explore these women's views on the government legislation and policies to empower them to achieve the 2030 vision. We asked how women felt about the new legislation and the empowerment process for achieving the 2030 vision. We collected data from women working in different public and private enterprises in Saudi Arabia. The number of women with jobs or professional women in Saudi Arabia has approximately doubled in the last five years. According to the World Bank collection of development indicators, the female population is 15.14 million (42.24%) of the population, against the male population of 20.70 million (57.76%) of the population of Saudi Arabia [86,87].

We applied random sampling to provide equal opportunities for the women to participate in this study and used a questionnaire to obtain the respondents' responses, collected through personal visits and an online survey. In the online survey we employed two significant modes. First, we send online surveys via email to respondents by attaching a link to the survey. Second, we applied SurveySparrow, one of the best free survey tools, which helps to turn boring surveys into pleasant conversations and offers a chat-like experience with the comfort of the smartphone. We also sent the link of SurveySparrow to the WhatsApp groups of Saudi Arabia's public and private enterprises, which were constituted during COVID-19. Before distributing the questionnaire to the respondents we correctly followed their ethical protocols.

Next, we distributed the questionnaire which mentioned on the cover page this study's aim and objectives. Then, we assured the respondents about their voluntary participation in the study. We assured them, also, about the arrangements to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their responses and guaranteed that their data would be used only for research purposes. Finally, before distributing the questionnaire, the researchers asked the respondents to sign a consent form. In total, the researchers distributed 500 questionnaires and received back 314 valid samples, which represented a 62% response rate.

According to Dommeyer et al. [88], a 43% online survey response rate is desirable, while a 75% response rate is excellent. This response rate is optimal because nonresponse bias is thought to be minimal with that of a high response rate (50–60% or greater). In terms of social research surveys, [89] suggests that 50% is an acceptable response rate in. Similarly, 70% is a desirable response rate for surveys [90]. In the circumstances, the researchers believe that this study's 62% response rate assures the respondents' anonymity of their answers [88]. Moreover, the women may be familiar with completing questionnaires without hesitation and with online questionnaire filing methods [89]. The limited number of scale items in the questionnaire may enhance the response rate [91].

We created and administered the questionnaire's language in English. There are several reasons behind choosing English as the best-fit language for the questionnaire. First, the respondents are educated and have the best learning attitudes towards the English language [92]. English is a compulsory or major subject in Saudi Arabian education, enabling individuals to become proficient in English [93]. Due to the global demand and the language of 'business and commerce', 'science and technology, etc.', the importance of the English language has multiplied in Saudi Arabia. Besides, most of respondents of the study possess university-level education, where English is a compulsory subject in Saudi Arabia [94,95]. Second, keeping in view the respondents' easiness or barrier about the language (English), the researchers also conducted a pilot study to ensure the questionnaire's validity and content (language). Consequently, the respondents did not mention any language barrier or issue in understanding the language or theme used in the questionnaire. Thus, we launched a reliable and valid questionnaire in English.



### 3.3. Scale Validation

The researchers conducted a pilot study to confirm the questionnaire's reliability and validity. In simple terms, the pilot study is significant in improving the quality and efficacy of the leading research [96]. The researchers ensured the questionnaire's reliability through Cronbach's alpha to observe the internal consistency among the items. In addition, we noted the factor loading to keep the internal correlation between the items and their respective constructs [97]. Consequently, both reliability assumptions appear with suitable scores since alpha is greater than 0.60 [98] and loading scores are greater than 0.70 [98]. After minor suggestions, the researchers distributed a reliable and valid questionnaire for a large-scale study. Moreover, we ensured the survey's validity by consulting field experts, mainly university professors, who were aware of the digital and present trends of quantitative studies conducted through questionnaires and analysis through AMOS. Consequently, the researchers ensured the content and validity of the item's structure and the format of the questionnaire.

### 3.4. Measures

The researchers adapted the dimensions of empowerment from Ref. [99]'s and Ref. [13]'s studies. More specifically, we used four items to measure EE. We used five items to evaluate SE. We used three items to measure PE. Similarly, we adapted five items from Ref. [36] to measure SFY, and used five items adapted from Ref. [100]'s study to measure FS. Finally, we used four items borrowed from the empirical studies of Refs. [13,36,99] to measure WE. We applied a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly agree, and 5 = strongly disagree. Appendix A sets out all the details of the questionnaire.

## 4. Data Analysis and Results

### 4.1. Demography

The researchers collected the data from women since they understand better the level of WE and the challenges that they face. The marital status distribution reveals that more responses came from the married women, 163 (51.9%), followed by single women, 92 (29.3%), Widow/Widower, 34 (10.8%), and finally, the divorced, 25 (8%). Education distribution reveals that we obtained most bachelor's degree holders, 166 (52.9%), followed by masters' education degree holders, 34 (10.8%), diploma holders 24 (7.6), and finally 1 Ph.D. holder, namely 3%. This depicts that most responses were obtained from well-educated people.

The demography displays the respondents' demographic aspects: most came from the western province, 131 (41.7%), followed by the Eastern province, 106 (33.8%), central, 16 (19.1%), Northern and, finally, Southern province accounting for 3.8% and 1.6%, respectively (see Table 1). We noticed more social indicators to observe the social trends of women. Concerning family dynamics, we observed that most women, 66.88% (n = 210), were living with a nuclear family, and 33.12% (n = 104) were living with an extended family. The gender role suggested that most women (72.61% or n = 228) were patriarchal while 27.39% (n = 86) were matriarchy. We found a significant number (76.43% or n = 240) of the family as a supportive network, 16.56% (n = 52) were seen as their friends, and 7.01% (n = 22) were the relatives who were their support networks. Finally, their household/family is headed by males (84.71% or n = 266) against females 15.2% (n = 48) (Table 1).

### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The researchers produced descriptive statistics to illustrate the picture of data of the entire population [98]. The mean scores appear between 2.003 (PE) and 3.823 (EE). In contrast, the range of standard deviation remains between 0.315 (WE) and 1.992 (PE) (see Table 2). Moreover, the correlation matrix also ensured the excellent strength of the relationship [98] and underlined that all factors correlate except for SE with WE (see Table 2).

**Table 1.** Demography of Respondents.

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Marital status	Single	92	29.3
	Marital Status	163	51.9
	Divorced	25	8.0
	Widow/Widower	34	10.8
	Total	314	100.0
Education level	Primary	15	4.8
	Secondary	31	9.9
	Intermediate	20	6.4
	Diploma	24	7.6
	Higher diploma	23	7.3
	Bachelor degree	166	52.9
	Master's degree	34	10.8
Province	Ph.D.	1	0.3
	Total	314	100.0
	Eastern	106	33.8
	Western	131	41.7
	Central	60	19.1
	Northern	12	3.8
Family dynamics	Southern	5	1.6
	Total	314	100.0
	Nuclear family	210	66.88
	Extended family	104	33.12
Gender role	Total	314	100.0
	Patriarchy	228	72.61
	Matriarchy	86	27.39
Supportive networks	Total	314	100.0
	Family	240	76.43
	Friends	52	16.56
	Relatives	22	7.01
Household/family headed by	Total	314	100.0
	Male	266	84.71
	Female	48	15.29
	Total	314	100.0

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	WE	EE	SE	PE	SFY	FS
WE	3.219	0.315	-					
EE	3.823	1.150	0.341 **	-				
SE	3.536	1.182	-0.123	0.293 **	-			
PE	2.003	1.992	0.400 **	0.421 **	0.139 *	-		
SFY	2.982	1.280	0.329 **	0.381 **	0.366 **	0.109 *	-	
FS	3.221	1.232	0.451 **	0.421 **	0.442 **	0.351 **	0.387 **	-

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Note(s): EE = economic empowerment; SE = social empowerment; PE = political empowerment; SFY = self-efficacy; FS = family support; WE = women empowerment.

#### 4.3. Measurement Model

The researchers based the measurement of the model on individuals' item reliability. We observed factor loadings in respect of the correlations and consistency among the items and their factors [101]. We noted the range of loadings from 0.780 (*sfy5*) to 0.882 (*ee1*). These values exceed 0.70 and present statistical significance and demonstrate high convergence on a common point [101]. However, some items such as *se4*, *sfy4* and *fs3* did not satisfy the suggested values, and were therefore excluded from further consideration.

Furthermore, reliability is the feature of construct validity; this is allied with the measurement's quality, consistency, and overall reliability. Accordingly, the Composite

Reliability (CR) values between 0.762 (WE) and  $-0.886$  (SFY) highlight the excellent internal consistency among the constructs. This is above the recommended values (0.70) [102]. The researchers observed that the average of the squared factor loading for either each variable or the Average Extracted Variance (AVE) ranged from 0.782 (WE) to 0.838 (EE). These are higher than 0.50 and indicate an adequate convergence [101]. Finally, the researchers conducted Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), the most used estimate of internal consistency [103]. In this study, the range of Cronbach's alpha remains between 0.792 and 0.864 ( $>0.70$ ) and ensures high or acceptable reliability for model validation (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Measurement Model.

Construct	Item Code	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	$\alpha$
Economic empowerment [EE]	ee1	0.882	0.877	0.838	0.862
	ee3	0.872			
	ee2	0.852			
	ee4	0.833			
Social empowerment [SE]	se1	0.842	0.828	0.802	0.827
	se5	0.825			
	se2	0.810			
	se3	0.809			
Political empowerment [PE]	pe1	0.881	0.839	0.799	0.792
	pe2	0.862			
	pe3	0.842			
Self-efficacy [SFY]	sfy1	0.860	0.886	0.821	0.802
	sfy2	0.842			
	sfy3	0.810			
	sfy5	0.780			
Family support [FS]	fs1	0.873	0.792	0.832	0.864
	fs2	0.859			
	fs4	0.832			
	fs5	0.822			
Women empowerment [WE]	we1	0.872	0.762	0.782	0.855
	we4	0.844			
	we2	0.840			
	we3	0.828			

#### 4.4. Structural Model

##### 4.4.1. Model Fitness

The researchers observed from the data the model's goodness of model fit [101]. We conducted a statistically based measure, namely,  $\chi^2$  or CMIN, to observe the likelihood ratio test. Consequently, the insignificant statistical scores ensured a good fit between the model and the data (CMIN = 2.493). Moreover, the other model fit indicators, such as NFI (0.902), CFI (0.911), GFI (0.922), AGFI (0.910) and RMSEA (0.035), ensured the satisfactory fitness of the data [104] (see Table 4). More specifically, the values of NFI, CFI, GFI and AGFI appear above the cut-off value ( $>0.90$ ), and the ratio of RMSEA is less than 0.05 and a ratio of 2 or 3 to one indicates a good or acceptable fit [105].

**Table 4.** Model Fitness Indicators.

CMIN/df	NFI	CFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
2.493	0.902	0.911	0.922	0.910	0.035

Note: CMIN =  $\chi^2$ /Chi-square/df; df = degree of freedom; NFI = normal fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; GFI = goodness of fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

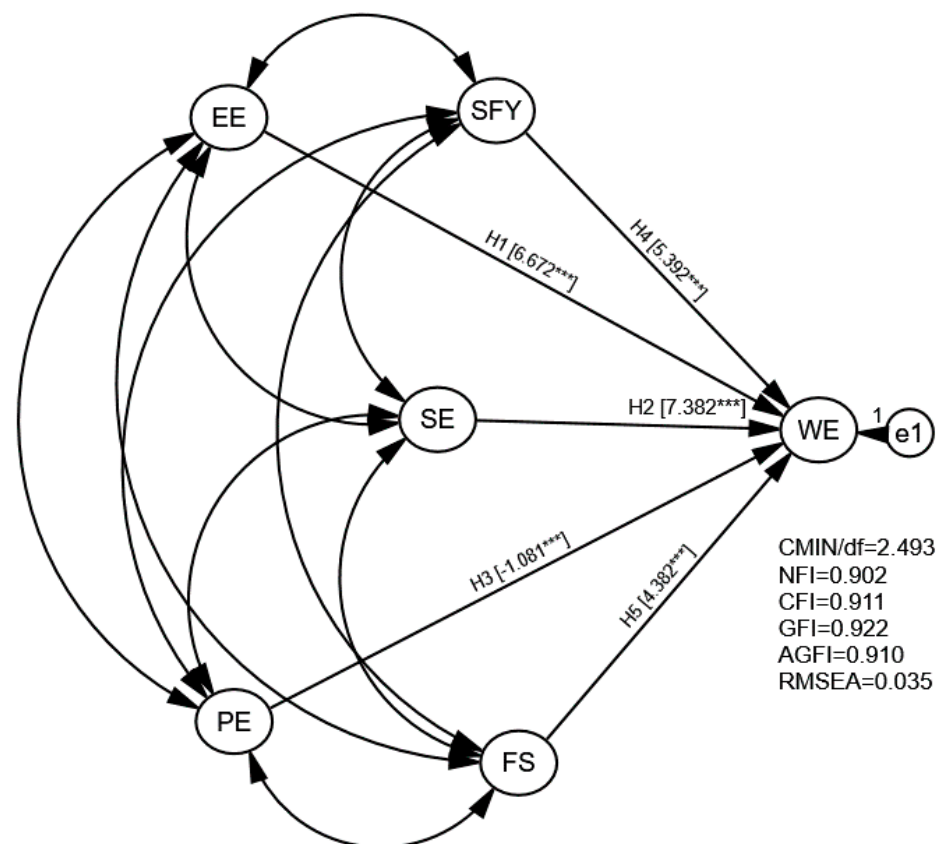
#### 4.4.2. Assessment of Hypotheses

The researchers used Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 26.0 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) for Windows to assess the proposed hypotheses. We applied a structural model which ensured the acceptance of the hypotheses based on t-values, with significant values of  $p$  at significance level  $*** p < 0.01$  while performing the path analysis. Turning to the direct paths, this study's findings indicate that EE and SE have positive and significant effects on WE (H1 =  $t = 6.672$   $***$ ; H2 =  $t = 7.382$   $***$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 5 and Figure 2). Therefore, hypotheses H1 and H2 rejected the null hypotheses. On the other hand, this study's analysis does not support that there is a positive and significant association between PE and WE (H3 =  $t = -1.081$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ). Therefore, hypothesis H3 is rejected (see Table 5 and Figure 2). Moreover, the analysis shows that SFY has a positive and significant and positive effect) on WE (H4 =  $t = 5.392$   $***$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 5 and Figure 2). Therefore, hypothesis H4 rejected the null hypothesis. Similarly, the data support FS' effect on WE (H5 =  $t = 4.382$   $***$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 5 and Figure 2).

**Table 5.** Path Co-efficient [direct effects].

H/No.	Relationships	Path Co-Efficient	t-Value	p-Value
H1	EE→WE	0.388	6.672	***
H2	SE→WE	0.332	7.382	***
H3	PE→WE	-0.080	-1.081	0.280
H4	SFY→WE	0.303	5.392	***
H5	FS→WE	0.120	4.382	***

$p$  = significance level  $*** p < 0.01$ . Note(s): EE = economic empowerment; SE = social empowerment; PE = political empowerment; SFY = self-efficacy; FS = family support; WE = women empowerment.



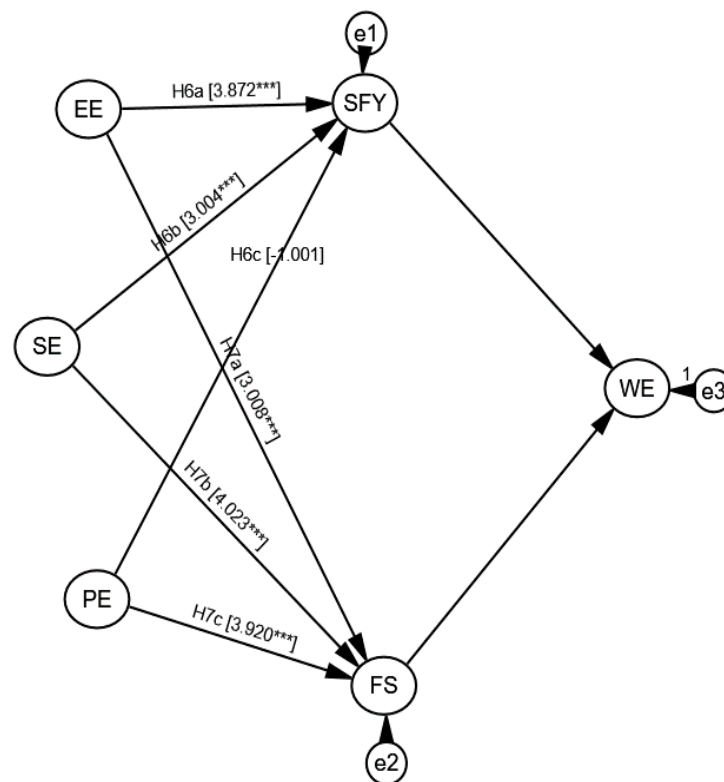
**Figure 2.** Path Analysis [direct paths]. (Source: Researchers' own estimation). Note(s): EE = economic empowerment; SE = social empowerment; PE = political empowerment; SFY = self-efficacy; FS = family support; WE = women empowerment.  $*** p < 0.05$ .

Turning to the indirect effects, this study's findings show that SFY has an indirect or mediating effect in developing the relationships between EE and WE and between SE and WE (H6a =  $t = 3.872^{***}$ ; H6b =  $t = 3.004^{***}$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 6 and Figure 3). On the other hand, the data do support SFY's mediating effect between PE and WE (H6c =  $-1.001$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ) (see Table 6 and Figure 3). Therefore, hypothesis H6c is rejected. Moreover, FS mediates both positively and significantly the relationships between EE and PE and between SE and PE) and with WE) (H7a =  $t = 3.008^{***}$ ; H7b =  $4.023^{***}$ ; H7c =  $t = 3.920^{***}$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 6 and Figure 3). Therefore hypotheses H7a, H7b and H7c rejected the null hypothesis.

**Table 6.** Path Co-efficient [indirect/mediating effects].

H/No.	Relationships	Path Co-Efficient	t-Value	p-Value
H6a	EE→SFY→WE	0.209	3.872	***
H6b	SE→SFY→WE	0.102	3.004	***
H6c	PE→SFY→WE	0.071	−1.001	0.672
H7a	EE→FS→WE	0.222	3.008	***
H7b	SE→FS→WE	0.329	4.023	***
H7c	PE→FS→WE	0.120	3.920	***

$p$  = significance level \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$ . Note(s): EE = economic empowerment; SE = social empowerment; PE = political empowerment; SFY = self-efficacy; FS = family support; WE = women empowerment.



**Figure 3.** Path Analysis [indirect paths]. (Source: Researchers' own estimation). Note(s): EE = economic empowerment; SE = social empowerment; PE = political empowerment; SFY = self-efficacy; FS = family support; WE = women empowerment. \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The researchers conducted this study among Saudi Arabian women to investigate their empowerment through economic, social, and political factors. In addition, the researchers tried to explore SFY's and FS's direct and mediating roles towards WE. The researchers applied a quantitative approach based on cross-sectional data and the study's findings show that EE and SE have positive and significant effects on WE (Therefore, hypotheses H1 and

H2 are supported). In respect of the literature, this study's findings are consistent with those of with several scholars such as [19,30,43,45,46]. These positive findings in relation to Saudi Arabian women reflect their beliefs in the economic benefits from microfinance, loans, and employment, which increase their purchasing power and economic stability. Their savings increase significantly due to an increase in their financial gains. They believe also that the SMEs improve their credit facilities, and that the Saudi Arabian Government intends to increase employment under the umbrella of the country's 2030 vision. From a social point of view, women believe strongly that they benefit from family relations and they enjoy their marital status. They are also confident with the Saudi Arabian Government's social care and are satisfied with themselves. On the other hand, this study's findings do not support PE's positive role towards WE. These findings are contrary to the general previous findings of numerous scholars such as [42,47,48]. These negative findings demonstrate that Saudi Arabian women are not put under any pressure to become involved in politics to empower them. They do not want to be part of any political decision-making process regarding their households. They do not want either to affiliate themselves or to present their representation in local governments through such as politics and informal organizations to resolve community issues. These are the constructive factors that lead to further WE. Their negative political trends show that their political awareness does not change their views toward politics. They do not believe in the assumption that contact with political leaders improves their group's position. Saudi society is a unique mix between religion and culture. Women's position in society is complicated and they confront significant educational and political barriers, i.e., due to living under male authority all the time [106]. There is little representation of Saudi Arabian women in political activities [107], where the cultural impact is one of the main factors affecting gender equality [108]. Due to the adherence to Islamic principles in society, Saudi Arabia is known to place more restrictions on women's mobility and public activities than other Arab or Muslim countries [109]. In most Muslim countries, there are fewer Islamic restrictions in relation to women's education. However, in Middle Eastern countries, women belonging to religious minority groups enjoy more freedom and occupy better jobs and political participation than Muslim women in traditionally conservative countries [106]. Consequently, there are very few opportunities in Saudi Arabia for women to participate in political activities such as either voting or running for office [110].

Furthermore, the path coefficients show that SFY and FS have positive and significant effects on WE (Therefore, hypotheses H4 and H5 are supported). Likewise, these findings are consistent with those of previous studies by [14,20,54,55,57,60]. These positive associations between SFY, FS and WE suggest that Saudi Arabian women are confident and productive in achieving their goals. They feel they can handle challenging tasks, believing in their completion on time. They are ambitious to achieve outcomes that are important to them. They believe in being successful in most of their endeavors. They think they can successfully overcome many challenges. Moreover, they are self-assured about performing most tasks effectively in difficult situations. Furthermore, their family members always support them and approve of all their actions. They encourage them to start their own businesses and give money to help them do so. Their family members also provide them with advice to effectively start their own businesses.

This study's findings provide evidence of SFY's positive mediating effect in developing EE's and SE's positive relationships with WE (Therefore, hypotheses H6a and H6b are supported). On the other hand, there is no evidence that SFY is a positive and significant mediator between PE and WE. The positive relationships are consistent with the findings of many scholars such as [1,36,68,69]. These show SFY's mediating effect between the different factors. These findings also show that when Saudi Arabian women feel confident and self-reliant, SFY significantly enhances WE through EE and SE.

On the other hand, SFY does not provide any mediating support in developing the association between PE and WE. This may be due to Saudi Arabian women being

disinterested in politics for empowerment. They prefer economic and social factors to empower themselves.

Furthermore, this study's findings demonstrate also that FS has a significant mediating role in strengthening the individual relationship between EE, SE and PE and WE. In addition, these findings reinforce those in previous studies by [71–75]. The mediating effects indicate that FS helps women to make business decisions. FS makes them more robust and resilient and empowers them properly.

In conclusion, the social status of women in Saudi Arabia shows the family dynamics of a large number of women living in a nuclear or elementary families where their family members are united by ties of partnership and parentage, usually comprising of a pair of adults and their socially predictable children. A comparatively low number of women lived in an extended family or joint family comprised of various generations—grandparents, parents, children and uncles, cousins and aunts. Gender roles are highly patriarchal in Saudi Arabian culture. Conventionally, females are secluded from most public decision-making and are anticipated to obey their fathers, brothers and husbands. They are regarded to be the carrier of family honor, and henceforth carry more excellent prospects of social compliance as predominantly vulnerable targets that are expected to be achieved. The family is a more supportive network, along with their friends and relatives in their society during their challenging and crisis times on which they rely a lot. Their household or family is mainly headed by males rather than females in Saudi Arabia. Women are fully supported by their families, and their marital relations also improved or became substantial rather than creating any disturbances in their marital status. In other words, female participation in enterprises did not devastate or affect their personal or married life. Moreover, their family members helped them in every walk of life, along with their organizational matters. The whole family is satisfied with them due to their active involvement and contribution to their empowerment.

This study's overall findings demonstrated a positive and significant effect of EE and SE on WE. In contrast, PE had a negative effect on the WE. Besides, SFY and FS positively and significantly affected the WE. With regard to mediating effects, the study found that a positive and significant mediating impact of FS played a positive and significant mediating effect between EE, SE and WE. On the other hand, FS did not positively and significantly develop the association between PE and WE. Finally, FS positively and significantly mediates the relationship between EE, SE, PE and WE among Saudi Arabian women.

## 6. Limitations, Implications and Future Research Paths

The researchers encountered some limitations in conducting this study, which is restricted to cross-sectional data from Saudi Arabian women. The study's conclusions are based on 314 samples and this may create issues in generalizing the findings. However, more specifically, the sample represents only Saudi Arabian women who work in top management positions in several segments of Saudi Arabian public and private enterprises. The researchers did not apply any theory in this study to underpin its conceptualization.

This study's findings provide significant implications. These provide policymakers and planners with a road map to develop policies regarding WE. The study's findings show the substantial and robust importance of EE, SE and PE in WE. Therefore, the researchers recommend that the Saudi Arabian Government provides more economic benefits and a conducive economic environment to empower women. This study's findings show that SFY and FS are the significant elements which strengthen WE. Therefore, the researchers recommend that the Saudi Arabian Government and its policy agents consider these factors and initiate training programs to encourage and help families set goals for their women. Finally, this study's findings contribute to the existing empirical evidence by providing new insights from a Middle East country.

In future, we recommend that more longitudinal studies be conducted to observe the empowerment trends among women. Moreover, there is a need to explore other factors such as attitudes, subjective norms, motivation, financial matters, and environmental challenges

needing to be explored, which restrict WE women. Finally, the researchers recommend that future studies be extended to large samples so that the findings can be generalized.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects who participated in this study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data are available upon request from researchers who meet the eligibility criteria. Please kindly contact the first author privately through e-mail.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

Factor	Item Description	Source
Economic empowerment [EE]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I believe that monthly expenditure on food increased after joining enterprise.</li> <li>2. I believe that monthly savings increased after joining enterprise.</li> <li>3. I believe that credit facilities increased after joining enterprise.</li> <li>4. I believe that enterprise is beneficial for employment generation.</li> </ol>	[13,99]
Social empowerment [SE]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I believe that family relations improved after joining enterprise.</li> <li>2. I believe that marital relations improved after joining enterprise.</li> <li>3. I believe that self-confidence improved after joining enterprise.</li> <li>4. I believe that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.</li> <li>5. Overall, I am satisfied with myself.</li> </ol>	[13,99]
Political empowerment [PE]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I believe that political awareness is necessary for enterprise members.</li> <li>2. I believe that political involvement is necessary for enterprise members.</li> <li>3. I believe that contact with the political leaders improves your group position.</li> </ol>	[13,99]
Self-efficacy [SFY]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I can solve the problems that happen to my life.</li> <li>2. I have control over things that happen in my life.</li> <li>3. If I set my mind on some goals, I can do it effectively.</li> <li>4. My actions can result in what will happen to me in the future.</li> <li>5. I can change and fix important things to make it better for the future.</li> </ol>	[36]
Family support [FS]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My family members will approve my actions.</li> <li>2. My family members encourage me to work in enterprise.</li> <li>3. If necessary, my family members loan me money to help me to work in enterprise.</li> <li>4. If necessary, my family members provide me with materials and equipment to help me while working in enterprise.</li> <li>5. My family members give me advice to work in enterprise or start my own business.</li> </ol>	[100]
Women empowerment [WE]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is meaningful for me to do my work.</li> <li>2. I am competent to do my work.</li> <li>3. I am autonomous doing my work.</li> <li>4. My impact is strong when I bring myself into my work.</li> </ol>	[13,36,99]



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