



## Explaining the Relationship Between Psychological Empowerment and the Resilience of Rural Residents Against COVID-19: (Case Study: the Kenvist Villages, Mashhad Township)

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### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** Empowering rural communities is a highly strategic approach to developing the full potential of society, enabling individuals and groups to become capable and resilient. In this context, maintaining resilience is an essential skill. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and the resilience of rural residents against COVID-19. The study area includes the villages of the Kanavist Rural District in Mashhad Township.

**Methodology:** The research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive in terms of methodology. The study population consists of 4,712 individuals living in 11 villages of Kanavist, Mashhad Township. Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 302 individuals was selected through simple random sampling. The research method is based on a researcher-made questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by university professors, and the composite reliability (CR) for all variables was above 0.7, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability among the items.

**Findings and Results:** For data analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) using PLS software and SPSS were employed. The results indicate a significant and positive relationship between self-determination and resilience (path coefficient = 0.476,  $t = 2.857$ ), between meaningfulness and resilience (path coefficient = 0.319,  $t = 3.964$ ), and between impact and resilience (path coefficient = 0.521,  $t = 2.371$ ). However, no significant relationship was found between self-esteem, trust, and competence with resilience. Based on the analysis, practical recommendations have been provided.

**Keywords:** Psychological Empowerment, Rural Resilience, COVID-19, Kanavist Villages, Mashhad Township.

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction:**

Given the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of life—especially in rural areas—resilience has been considered a vital adaptive response (Zhang et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2020). In this context, psychological empowerment, particularly the components of competence, self-determination, and impact, can play a key role in enhancing resilience (Mahmoud & Saeed, 2021; Dasantos et al., 2024). In Iran, despite the focus on the economic dimensions of rural empowerment, the psychological dimension has received less attention (Rokneddin Eftekhari & Heydari Sarban, 2017; Kayani et al., 2024). In the Kanavist Rural District of Mashhad—considered a semi-developed rural area—structural limitations, a lack of educational infrastructure, and weak social participation have hindered the development of psychological empowerment dimensions. This situation has led to a decline in the psychological resilience of residents in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Given these conditions, the present study seeks to answer the following question: What is the relationship between the dimensions of psychological empowerment (competence, self-determination, and impact) and the resilience of rural residents in the Kanavist District of Mashhad in the face of the COVID-19 crisis?

### **Methodology:**

To measure the indicators of psychological empowerment in relation to the resilience of rural residents against COVID-19, a researcher-made structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire included indicators of meaningfulness, self-determination, competence, self-esteem, and trust for psychological empowerment, and economic, social, and environmental dimensions for resilience. The content validity of the indicators was confirmed through literature review and expert opinions from university faculty. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all variables ranged from 0.70 to 0.89, indicating acceptable to excellent reliability. Additionally, the composite reliability scores for all constructs were above 0.70, confirming strong internal consistency of the questionnaire. The finalized questionnaire was coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. The statistical population comprised all rural households in the Kanavist District, totaling 4,712 households based on the most recent census data. The district includes 34 villages, from which 11 villages were selected. Using Cochran's formula, a sample size of 302 respondents was determined. A simple random sampling method (lottery-based) was employed. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via PLS version 3 and SPSS software.

### **Results and Discussion:**

This study examined the relationship between psychological empowerment components and resilience during the COVID-19 crisis using structural equation modeling. Results showed that self-determination, meaningfulness, and impact were significantly and positively related to resilience, while self-esteem, trust, and competence were not. These findings highlight the importance of fostering autonomy and meaning to enhance resilience. Additionally, low levels of trust and social resilience indicate the critical role of institutional structures and social networks in building sustainable resilience. Therefore, psychological empowerment efforts should be accompanied by improvements in institutional and social contexts.

The analysis revealed significant positive path coefficients between self-determination (0.476), meaningfulness (0.319), and impact (0.521) with resilience. These results align with prior studies emphasizing that higher resilience is associated with greater empowerment and perceived impact. However, the lack of significant relationships between self-esteem, trust, competence, and resilience contrasts with some earlier findings, suggesting contextual differences.

Overall, psychological empowerment, especially in self-determination, competence, and meaningfulness, was found at desirable levels among rural residents in Mashhad's Konvst area, supporting previous research on motivation and self-efficacy's role in individual resilience.

### **Indicators of the dependent and independent variables of the research**

To measure the indicators of psychological empowerment related to rural residents' resilience against COVID-19, a structured or researcher-made questionnaire was used."

"The questionnaire was designed based on psychological empowerment, incorporating indicators such as meaningfulness, self-determination, competence, self-esteem, and trust; and in terms of resilience, it included economic, social, and environmental dimensions. To confirm the validity of the indicators, both literature review and expert opinions from university professors were utilized. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha values for all examined variables ranged from 0.70 to 0.89, indicating acceptable to excellent reliability of the constructs."

### **Conclusion:**

Despite individual psychological empowerment, low levels of trust (3.17) and social resilience (3.27) indicate that without supportive networks and institutional trust, collective resilience cannot be achieved. This highlights the need to revisit rural development policies to focus not only on individual skills but also on strengthening institutional capacities, participatory local systems, and equitable resource access. Psychological empowerment, especially through self-determination, meaningfulness, and impact, significantly enhances resilience among rural communities facing crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, while components like competence, self-esteem, and trust showed no significant effect.

Policy Recommendations:

Revise rural development policies to foster active local participation and real empowerment in decision-making, moving away from top-down approaches.

Design educational and psychological interventions that promote self-determination, goal-setting, responsibility, and social participation beyond mere awareness-raising.

Strengthen local participatory institutions (e.g., councils, cooperatives) that enable practical involvement and social resilience, supported financially and legally.

Empower vulnerable groups such as women and youth by creating decision-making spaces, job opportunities, and social roles.

Implement community-based mental health services in rural areas, involving local health centers and social facilitators, beyond clinical treatments.

Future research should explore the relationship between social participation experiences and resilience, and examine demographic effects on psychological empowerment and resilience.

### **Declarations**

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•**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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