

# Malaysian Women's Perceptions About Their Autonomy: The Psychological-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment

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## Abstract

Women in some societies are experiencing a psychosocial dysfunction that strongly restricts their involvement in activities that are their basic rights; they revealed a minimal level of personal autonomy and little influence on decision-making. Even so, little is known about women's empowerment in a Malaysian context. Hence, it is essential to examine the empowerment of women across three levels: personal, relational, and environmental. However, the focus of this paper is on personal level as that is more related to the psychological dimension of women's in Malaysia. Data was gathered through a survey among 116 respondents from different backgrounds. Standardized scales were used to measure the key concepts, the data was then analyzed using descriptive analyses alongside correlation coefficient as well as mean ranking to test the data-model fit. The findings indicated that demographic characteristics are important components that significantly influence the psychological dimensions of women empowerment in Malaysia. Educational and income levels play an important role in women's self-confidence. In contrast, age, marital-status, and income-level play an important role in women's awareness of their rights. In addition, education level strengthens leadership skills, while age, education-level, employment sector, and monthly-income increase compatibility. In contrast, age, education level, and monthly income strengthen personal autonomy. The findings also revealed that amongst the five psychological magnitudes of empowerment, capability is identified as the core dimension that increases the level of women's empowerment followed by leadership ability, personal autonomy, confidence level, and lastly, Women's awareness of their rights. The findings obtained from this research can help to propose an innovative psychological-dimensional model for women; it's, indeed, an avenue for researchers to understand women's psychological needs. Thus, this is crucial to provide suitable suggestions on planning the next course of action on how to close the psychological gender gap among Malaysia women in the future.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Personal-Level, Psychological-Dimension, Psychological Empowerment

**Introduction**

The issue of empowerment has become indispensable in today's world, and women's empowerment is recognized as an important policy goal (UN General Assembly, 2015). Even so, little is known about women's participation and empowerment in a Malaysian context. Therefore, it is a key component of strategies to promote gender equality and women empowerment in Malaysia. As far as we know, gender equality is not just about the equal status that women are entitled to, but rather the opportunities that are available to women. The concept of gender equality means that the same conditions apply to women and men so that they can fully enjoy their human rights and have equal opportunities to contribute to economic, social, cultural, and political development (Zeti, 2011). It is important to create mutual understanding between genders and convince them that the treatment of women and men should be fair. According to Norfarhanis et al (2016), when women are more aware, they can realize that gender bias results from unequal treatment. It leads to the awareness that women also have a right to make a decision and compete with men to create mutual understanding (Norfarhanis et al., 2016).

Although the concept of gender equality and women's empowerment was not widely used in the past, there was a sense that women need to be empowered even before they have the right to vote. In 2019, 49.584 percent of the world's population is female (The Worlds Bank, 2019), similarly, in Malaysia; the statistics shows that almost half of the total population is female (Department of Statistic, 2020), and it would be unwise to ignore the rights of nearly half of the world's population. After all, women are recognized as a group that has a great impact on the progress of the country. According to Alam (2017), women play an important role in Malaysia's development and their participation in the labor force could provide the country with an additional per capita income of about \$2,300. Indeed, gender equality is the foundation of women rights and the basis for a peaceful and sustainable globe Zeti (2011), this is because women contribute to economic development, social progress, educational attainment, and family growth. Therefore, empowering women and change in social norms in Malaysia will let the role of women becoming more essential.

As far as we know, the topic of empowerment is found in numerous fields of study, including education, sociology, anthropology, economics, women's studies, and public health. However, researchers have consistently encountered difficulties in standardizing the concept of empowerment. Empowerment has been intellectualized as a component of a relational or power-sharing view (Burpitt & Bigones, 1997; Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). Indeed, empowerment begins with an understanding of the person's identity; thus, this self-knowledge often leads to analyzing the self-determination of others and encouraging their commitment to social change (Hall, 1992). Moreover, Chamberlin (1997) has viewed empowerment as a process that has a number of qualities such as decision-making power, access to information and resources, autonomy or/and access to a range of options to make choices. The immensity of the empowerment concept can be overwhelming, and its applicability has been limited by the concept's ambiguity. This is because empowerment is a construct that Kieffer (1984) describes as cognitive, affective, social, political, and spiritual. This definition illustrates that change can occur at different levels: psychological, relational, and environmental. Nevertheless, this article focuses only on the psychological dimension of women's empowerment (PE) by providing a simple framework that can be used to address issues related to women's psychological empowerment.

Given that structural empowerment can be a driver of psychological empowerment, psychological empowerment is defined as an essential task that reflects a sense of self-control

in relation to their activities in life (Seibert et al., 2011). Psychological empowerment is a key construct in developing accurate knowledge about how individuals maintain their connections in society and how they lead and positively develop in their community. From a broader perspective, psychological empowerment refers to gaining control and mastery over some aspect of life (Rappaport, 1987). The dimensions of psychological empowerment refer to community members who have confidence in the traditions, cultural and values inherent in nature and are optimistic about their future (Scheyvens, 1999). Spreitzer (1995) defined psychological empowerment as an intrinsic task motivation that manifests itself in cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work roles. Intrinsic task motivation is a positively valued experience that an individual derives directly from a task that produces motivation and satisfaction. This can enhance the sense of self-importance and enthusiasm that can lead to the growth of confidence among members of society to participate in social activities by mutual cooperation among the community (Scheyvens, 1999).

A Matter of Fact explores the topic of women empowerment as a method of changing women's lives from a situation in which they have little power to one in which their power is enhanced (VeneKlassen and Miller, 2002). Similarly, psychological research suggests that woman's empowerment is a process that enables the women to act on and improve matters that are important to their individual lives, communities, and society (Cattaneo and Chapman, 2010). These definitions emphasize the expansion of women's individual capabilities and the free exercise of personal choice (Budgeon, 2015; Kurtiş et al., 2016). However, previous research has highlighted that the act of choice does not necessarily equate to progressive outcomes for women, as women's individual choices are historically and structurally conditioned (Budgeon, 2015). Additionally, Mónica et al (2019) have indicated that empowering women requires them to have self-confidence, which is essential for leadership capacity. The development of self-confidence and autonomy in women is one of the significant signs of the emergence of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Ozer, & Bandura, 1990). The changes on a woman's psychology take place within her; it is about how she sees herself, how she sees her role in society, and how she has confidence in herself. The human capital theories have explained the barriers to women in accessing management positions are due to stereotyping, and lacking self-confidence (Matheson, & Lyle, 2017). Thus, these create gaps among women to look for empowerment.

Indeed, empirical research has examined women's empowerment using criteria such as autonomy, agency, self-determination, and self-confidence (Hansen, 2015). However, all definitions emphasize that women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various components and assumes that empowerment is a process that leads from not being empowered to being empowered. Combining these views, we propose that empowerment is a process through which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices that, in turn, help them increase their self-esteem and self-confidence, understand their power, and value their knowledge and skills. Desai (2010) also pointed out that women need to have power and authority in making important decisions; this can only be achieved if women's psychological empowerment is taken into account. In conclusion, women should be empowered; they should be given the same amount of power as men and be included in decision-making. This will help them to defend themselves, make fateful decisions in their lives, improve their abilities, educate themselves, know their rights and duties to society, realize their ambitions and aspirations by eliminating all stereotypical processes and attitudes in society and providing all material, legal, moral, economic and educational means to expand their capabilities and improve their status in life. Therefore, our aim in this paper is not to

provide a comprehensive and integrated model of empowerment at the three levels - the personal level, the relational level, and the environmental level - but to provide an idea of women's personal autonomy and their psychological dimensional model of empowerment in order to clarify what makes them feel inferior: Self-confidence, leadership, knowledge, skills, and personal autonomy.

### **Research Methodology**

The research used a quantitative method to quantify the opinions of the quadruple helix, i.e., policymakers, educators, the community, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, to obtain an unbiased opinion on the issue. Prior to collecting data for this study, some criteria were established to determine the appropriate target population. Data was collected between January and March 2021 through an online survey. Participants were contacted through an email invitation, enquiring participation in the survey, and if they agreed, the online questionnaire will be send. A total of 116 participants agreed to answer the survey questions. Individuals were informed about the purpose of the study and the study procedure. The study, as mentioned earlier, is purely quantitative in terms of the constructs; this is consistent with the deductive process and narrowing down to the specific research problems (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The qualitative approach is not used in this study because the research problems are not something that has not been explored in previous studies, but reflect different views on women empowerment in Malaysia. Standardized scales were used to measure the key concepts of the model. The scales were adopted from Oxfam GB (2017) on Measuring Women's Empowerment; undeniably, the questionnaire was aligned with the research objectives. A questionnaire was used to collect the data and the instruments used in this study were from existing and proven survey instruments. The questionnaire measures women's empowerment at three levels: personal, relationship, and environment. However, the focus of this article is only on the outcome that focuses on the constructs of psychological empowerment, including self-confidence, leadership, knowledge, skills, and personal autonomy. The reliability coefficients of the items were found to be alpha. 88 which was high and acceptable in the Malaysian context. In order for a test to be useful for prediction, classification, or for any other purpose, the reliability coefficient must be approximately. 70 or higher (Walker & Blettner, 1985). A low-reliability coefficient severely limits the possible magnitude of the validity coefficient, and that in turn greatly impairs the predictive value of the test. Questionnaires were distributed only in English language, and scale items were scored on a different point scale depending on the measure.

### **Findings and Results**

This section presents the discussion on the key findings with a focus on identified patterns and themes related to the participants' views on empowerment. Nevertheless, the outcome of this research concentrates only on the personal dimension of women's empowerment because what makes women feel inferior needs to be documented.

### **Respondents' Background**

Figure 1 shows the dissemination of participants' characteristics and respondents' background; the distribution is based on their gender, age, race, marital status, educational level, employment, etc.



Fig. 1. Respondents Background

As Figure 1 demonstrates, 69.0 percent of the 116 participants participating in the survey were female, and 31.0 percent were male. Researchers quantified that 50.9 percent of the participants were under 30 years old, 25.9 percent were between 30 and 39 years, 16.4 percent were between 40 and 49 years, six percent were between 50 and 59 years, with zero percent of the sample aged 60 and over. This suggests that the need for empowerment is strongest among the younger-aged group, rather than the middle and middle and senior age groups. In terms of educational status, 4.3 percent, and 9.5 percent of participants graduated from primary, and secondary school respectively, with 20.7 percent had diplomas, 47.4 percent was with bachelor's degrees, and 17.2 percent with master's and Ph.D. qualifications. This indicates that almost all are educated and the majority are university graduates. This indicates that the level of education is an important factor for them to call upon

empowerment. Indeed, researchers also measured respondents' races, the results showed that 85.3 percent of the participants were Malay, 2.6% were Indians, 3.4% were Chinese and 7.8% were of other ethnic groups. Additionally, in terms of employment level, the results indicated that only 10.3% of the participants were unemployed and the other 90% were employed. Their income revealed that 5.2% have no income at all; likewise 5.2% have an income of less than RM1000. Another 12.9% have an income of between RM1001 and RM2000, and 21.6% of them have between RM2001 and RM3000, and the other as shown in the above figure. To put this income level into perspective, respondents' contributions to the house were also measured and the results indicated in the above figure clearly.

### Self-Confidence

Self-confidence was explained differently throughout the literature; the thing that matters to this study is a specific task with self-confidence being an evaluation based on emotions about self-esteem. Hence, the instrument focuses on how a woman regards herself when empowerment comes into the picture, and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Respondents Self-Confidence*

Items	Strongly disagree	Partly disagree	Partly agree	Strongly agree	Total
<b>I feel that I'm a person of worth same with others</b>	3.7	4.9	59.3	32.1	100.0
<b>I feel that I have an efficient amount of good characteristics</b>	2.5	4.9	49.4	43.2	100.0
<b>I am similar to my peers</b>	2.5	18.5	53.1	25.9	100.0

Self-confidence in most societies is considered a valuable individual asset. In going back to the history of psychology, James (1890) has indicated that an important strand in psychology has advocated, "believing in oneself" as a key to personal success. Indeed, self-confidence reflects women's beliefs and feelings about their ability to do a specific task. The concept of self-confidence is one that most people are familiar with, thus, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree on questions like: "*I feel that I'm a person of worth same with others*", "*I feel that I have an efficient amount of good characteristics*", and "*I am similar to my peers (e.g. sisters, friends, colleagues, etc.)*". The results on self-confidence indicate that majority partly strongly agree that they are a person of worth, have good qualities, and they are equal to their peers. In research on women empowerment that embraces the awareness of self-confidence, it is indicated that Women with high self-confidence are in control of their lives both at home and abroad and can make a difference in society (Greenacre, Tung, & Chapman, 2014). It's indicated in the literature that self-confidence plays an important role in the emergence of leaders in organizations; these studies prove that self-confidence occurs outside the organizational contexts (Beefink, et al., 2012). The result demonstrates the idea that women in Malaysia are confident enough to lead and therefore, they need to be empowered. The total mean for Self-Confidence in relation to the respondents' background was measured and the results are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

*Self-Confidence In Relation To Respondents' Background*

Self-Confidence	Age	Marital status	Race	Educational level	Employment sector	Monthly income	Total Household Income	Percentage of own contribution
<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	0.163	0.124	0.063	.224*	0.134	.246**	.217*	-0.058
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.081	0.185	0.504	0.016	0.153	0.008	0.020	0.540
<b>N</b>	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
<b>Missing value</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	116	116	116	116	116	116	116	116

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Based on Table 2, the correlation is high between self-confidence and the total educational level of respondents; it was  $r = .224$  at 0.05 level, while for Monthly income and Total Household Income were  $r = .246$  and  $r = .217$  respectively at 0.01 level. The significance levels reported above (for educational level: Sig. = .016; for Monthly income: Sig. = .008, and for Total Household Income: Sig. = .020) provide a test of the null hypothesis that the correlation coefficient in the population is 0. This supports the idea that levels of education and income play an important role in the self-confidence of women. Similarly, it is also indicated by Al-Salameh (2010), that there was a statistically significant effect of educational level on self-confidence. People with a high educational level and good monthly income are more confident compared to others. This is because self-confidence is associated with happiness and wellbeing. Indeed, it is also related to personality because self-confidence is an important personality trait that affects an individual's behavior along various life stages and is considered as an indicator of normal personality and psychosocial adaptability (Mruk, 1995; Abouserie, 1994).

### Ability In Leadership

It is stated that the European Union fully integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their policy, giving concern to the 5<sup>th</sup> SDG gender equality to be one of the fundamental values in promoting policies related as maximize female talents and achieve their full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of political, economic, and decision-making (Barbara, et al., 2017). This is what is happening in developed countries, what about women's leadership in developing countries? In this research, a focus is given to women in Malaysia to understand the extent of women have the leadership ability and the opinions of male counterparts on this topic. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Respondents' Leadership Ability*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Either woman or man is a better leader.</b>					
<b>Valid</b>	Women can be leaders just like men	32	27.6	27.6	27.6
	Men have better leadership than women	83	71.5	71.5	99.1
	Missing value	1	0.86	0.86	100.0
	Total	116	100.0	100.0	

Respondents were asked to give their opinions on either women or men make a better leader. Based on Table 3, the majority agrees that men are better leaders than women. This is due to the stereotypes, along with culture, in which women are seen only as taking care of family and the leadership is fully specified to men. This happens because men are predominantly regarded as leaders in the workplace. Hence, to be more accurate on who agrees with the above statement, the researcher tries to narrate the answer of a different gender as well as age group. Surprisingly, the results are wonderful and are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Leadership Ability in Relation to Age and Gender*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent		
<b>Either woman or man is a better leader.</b>							
<b>Female</b>	Under 30 years old	Women can be leaders just like men	5	13.5	13.5	12.5	
		Men have better leadership than women	32	86.5	86.5	100.0	
	Over 30 years old	Women can be leaders just like men	17	40.0	40.0	40.0	
		Men have better leadership than women	25	60.0	60.0	100.0	
	<b>Male</b>	Under 30 years old	Women can be leaders just like men	5	22.7	22.7	23.1
			Men have better leadership than women	17	77.3	77.3	100.0
Over 30 years old		Women can be leaders just like men	5	35.7	35.7	33.3	
		Men have better leadership than women	9	64.3	64.3	100.0	



Table 4 presents the result that indicates 86.5 percent of the female under the age of 30 agree that male is better than female in term of leadership. Whereas, 77.3 percent of a male under the age of 30 agree that male is better than female in their leadership. This shows that the male is more confident than women in terms of leadership. Only 13.5 percent of females of the same age group indicated, *“Women can be leaders just like men”*, whereas, 22.7 percent of men were sure that *“Women can be leaders just like men”*. This answer is very difficult to relate to women’s confidence level. This raises the question of whether are they not confident in their ability or are still young to give an accurate answer since they are under 30 years old. But it can be related to their education level. In this study, education has been classified into three categories; school, college, and higher education (Master & Ph.D.). The study results are in line with the existing literature in the field; scholars argue that education improves awareness of basic human rights (Tijani, & Yano, 2007). Moreover, education plays an important role in women; it improves their socio-economic status and enables them to claim their rights more effectively (Parveen & Leonhäuser, 2005). Highly educated women have positive views of their lives, which make them more active to participate in decision-making and ultimately be more confident.

Training is one of the most important measures in human capital theories, therefore, the researcher studies the view of respondents on this issue, and the result is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Can a woman be as good a leader as a man?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	It is a waste to train women to be a leader because men do the job better	4	3.45	3.45	3.45
	It is good to train the women to be the leader because they do the job equally to men	111	95.69	95.69	99.14
	Missing value	1	0.86	0.86	100.0
	Total	116	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that 95.69 percent of the respondents agree with the statement: *“It is good to train the women to be a leader because they do the job equally to men”*. Training is one of the effective methods in improving a person’s ability, which in return develops skills, knowledge, and confidence level that can help women, for instance, in achieving opportunities in everything. Different studies have highlighted the importance of training for women and women’s lack of training in leadership abilities, skills, tools, and self-confidence are creating barriers for females to gain leadership positions (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Alkadry & Tower, 2006). This supports the idea that women in Malaysia need more training on leadership and their ability will be the same as their male counterparts. According to Abdullatip (2020), education and training are some of the most important elements in empowering women as women will gain knowledge, skills, and self-confidence that are vital for them to actively take part in the development process. More analysis was conducted on this and Table 6 provides the result on the respondents’ opinions about *“marriage or education for women”*.

Table 6

*Marriage Or Education For Women*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Marriage is more significant for girls than education	23	19.8	19.8	19.8
	Education is very important for girls than marriage	92	79.31	80.2	99.11
	Missing value	1	0.86	0.86	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 6 depicts that 79.31 percent of the respondents agree with the point that: “*Education is very important for girls than marriage*”. This is similar to what has been indicated by Mónica et al (2019); in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); education is considered as a sign for development to give equal opportunities for both males and females, and in this sense, education plays an important role in ensuring gender equality, mainly to help women reach leadership positions. Hence, the correlation between the leadership ability and respondents’ backgrounds was measured and the result is illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

*Leadership Ability In Relation To Respondents’ Background*

Leadership	Age	Marital status	Race	Education level	Employment sector	Monthly income	Total Household Income	Percentage of own contribution
<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	0.056	-0.079	0.115	.248**	-0.072	0.118	0.144	-0.061
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.552	0.404	0.223	0.008	0.447	0.209	0.125	0.518
<b>N</b>	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
<b>Missing value</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	116	116	116	116	116	116	116	16

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Based on Table 7, the correlation is high between leadership ability and educational level of respondents; it is  $r = .248$  at 0.01 level and the significance levels reported for educational level is  $\text{Sig.} = .008$ . This supports the idea that educational level strengthens leadership ability.

**Awareness of Women Rights**

Women's empowerment can also be achieved through an awareness of their rights. The result of this is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Awareness of Women Rights*

Items	True	False	Don't know	Total %
Women have the right to ask for alimony husbands.	87.7	2.5	9.9	100.0
A woman does not have the right to custody over her husband and/or son.	90.1	6.2	3.7	100.0
Women have the right to sue the aggressive husbands who abuse them.	93.8	1.2	4.9	100.0
A woman has the right to ask for divorce if a husband did not give custody.	74.1	8.6	17.3	100.0
If a husband persistently fails to pay alimony to the wife, he can be put in jail.	59.3	13.6	27.2	100.0
A woman married to a foreigner can't give her nationality to her husband.	34.6	24.7	40.7	100.0
A single woman has no right to ask to register her children.	11.1	66.7	22.2	100.0

Table 8 depicts the result on the awareness of the respondents on their rights in certain issues. They were asked to indicate the level that they agreed on the above statement to be "true" or "false". It is found that the majority of the respondents are aware of their constitutional rights as: "A woman has the right to ask for alimony from husband", "A woman does not have the right of custody over her son", "A woman has the right to sue the husband if he abuses her", ...etc. In a study conducted, this is also true in which it states that the status of women in Malaysia improved over time, this is because of the increased access of women to education and the awareness of their rights. Legal amendments have been made to eliminate any discrimination against women on an ongoing basis (Nik-Salida et al., 2020).

Table 9

*Awareness Of Women Rights in Relation To Respondents' Background*

Awareness Level	Age	Marital status	Race	Educational level	Employment sector	Monthly income	Total Household Income	Percentage of own contribution
Correlation Coefficient	.291**	.288**	-0.034	0.082	0.067	.262**	.220*	-0.123
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.002	0.715	0.384	0.479	0.005	0.018	0.189
N	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
Missing value	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	116	116	116	116	116	116	116	16

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

According to Table 9, the correlation is high between awareness level and age, marital status, monthly income and total household income of respondents;  $r = .291$ ,  $r = .288$ ,  $r = .262$ , and  $r = .220$  respectively at 0.01 level and 0.05 level. The significance level reported for age is  $\text{Sig.} = .002$ , marital status is  $\text{Sig.} = .002$ , monthly income is  $\text{Sig.} = .005$ , and total household income is  $\text{Sig.} = .018$ . This result supports the idea that age, marital status, and income level play an important role in women's awareness of their rights.

### The Capability of Women

A person's capability refers to the freedom of an individual to choose between two or more different options. And in the context of empowerment, it is indicated that education increases women's capability to deal with the outside world, including various groups of government officials and service providers. In this research, women's capability was measured and the results are indicated in Table 10.

Table 10  
*Capability of Women*

Items	Strongly disagree	Partly disagree	Partly agree	Strongly agree	Total %
<b>Women are capable of contributing to the wellbeing of the community just like men</b>	1.2	2.5	27.2	69.1	100.0
<b>A woman in my society has little voice to discuss community development.</b>	0	37.0	46.9	16.0	100.0
<b>I am willing to support the women in my community if they face any legal action.</b>	0	3.7	29.6	66.7	100.0
<b>I am willing to support the women in my community financially if they face a legal issue.</b>	0	2.5	51.9	45.7	100.0
<b>I am willing to support the women in my community in finding free legal consultation.</b>	8.6	16.0	46.9	28.4	100.0
<b>If needed, I would be willing to file a lawsuit in court.</b>	1.2	12.3	49.4	37.0	100.0
<b>Other people in the community often ask me for advice or support when they need it.</b>	3.7	12.3	55.6	28.4	100.0

Table 10 depicts that the respondents either partially disagree (37 percent) or partially agree (46.9 percent) with the statement "A woman in my society has little voice to discuss community development". It is found that the majority of the respondents (69.1 percent) strongly agree that they are just as capable as men of contributing to the community's wellbeing. Another 66.7 percent of the respondents strongly agree that they are "willing to support the women in their community if they face any legal action". It is also found that the majority of respondents partially agree with "willing to support women in their community financially if they face legal matter", "knows how to help them in finding free legal consultation", "willing to file a lawsuit in court", and "offer advice or support to other people

in the community when they need it" with 51.9, 46.9, 49.4, and 55.6 percent respectively. The total mean for the capability of women in relation to their backgrounds was measured and the results are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

*Capability in Relation To Respondents' Background*

Women Capability	Age	Marital Status	Race	Educational level	Employment sector	Monthly income	Total Household Income	Percentage of own contribution
<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	.207*	0.132	0.055	.219*	.220*	.201*	0.179	-0.004
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.026	0.158	0.562	0.019	0.018	0.032	0.056	0.964
<b>N</b>	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
<b>Missing value</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	116	116	116	116	116	116	116	16

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Table 11 illustrates that the correlation is high between capability and age ( $r = .207$ ), educational level ( $r = .219$ ), employment sector ( $r = .220$ ), and monthly income ( $r = .201$ ) at 0.05 level. This concludes that age, educational level, employment sector, and monthly income play an important role in incompatibility.

**Personal Autonomy**

Women empowerment can also be achieved through personal autonomy and Table 12 shows the result of the analysis conducted on this variable.

Table 12

*Personal Autonomy*

Items	Not at all	To some extent	To a large extent	Missing value	Total %
<b>Can you travel alone to visit relatives outside the community?</b>	4.3	29.3	36.2	30.2	100.0
<b>Can you participate in different activities in your place?</b>	1.7	33.6	34.5	30.2	100.0
<b>Can you participate in meetings that taking place in your community?</b>	4.3	30.2	35.3	30.2	100.0
<b>Can you participate in arguments with people of your community?</b>	15.5	34.5	19.8	30.2	100.0

Women need autonomy as they are neither (to some extent) nor (to large extent) agree with their ability to "personally travel alone to visit relatives outside the community, "personally participate in different activities in their place", "personally participate in meetings that taking place in their community", and "personally participate in arguments with people of their

community". According to Liu, et al (2011), there is a positive link between autonomy and psychological empowerment. Finally, the total mean for autonomy in relation to respondents' background was measured and the results are demonstrated in Table 13.

Table 13  
*Personal Autonomy in Relation To Respondents' Background*

Personal Autonomy	Age	Marital status	Race	Education level	Employment sector	Monthly income	Total Household Income	Percentage of own contribution
<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	.191*	0.110	0.087	.258**	0.088	.197*	0.177	0.004
<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0.041	0.243	0.353	0.005	0.348	0.035	0.058	0.965
<b>N</b>	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
<b>Missing value</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	116	116	116	116	116	116	116	16

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Table 13 shows that the correlation is high between autonomy and age (r= .191), educational level (r= .258), and monthly income (r= .197) at 0.01 and 0.05 levels. This reinforces that age, educational level, and monthly income play an important role in personal autonomy.

**The Psychological-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment**

Pearson correlations test was conducted to measure the dimensions of empowerment in relation to confidence, leadership, awareness, capability, and autonomy, and the results are depicted in Table 14.

Table 14  
*Psychological-Dimension of Women's Empowerment*

		Confidence Level	Leadership Ability	Awareness	Capabilities	Personal Autonomy
<b>Empowerment</b>	Pearson Correlation	.964**	.977**	.932**	.992**	.968**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	116	116	116	116	116
<b>The Ranking level</b>		4	2	5	1	3

Table 14 illustrates that the five psychological dimensions are crucial, and they are all related to women's empowerment. When they are ranked according to how significant they are in relation to women empowerment, capability comes first followed by leadership ability, personal autonomy, confidence level, and finally awareness of their rights. From the above

outcome, the researcher introduces a framework on a psychological-dimensional model of women empowerment and this is shown in Figure 2.

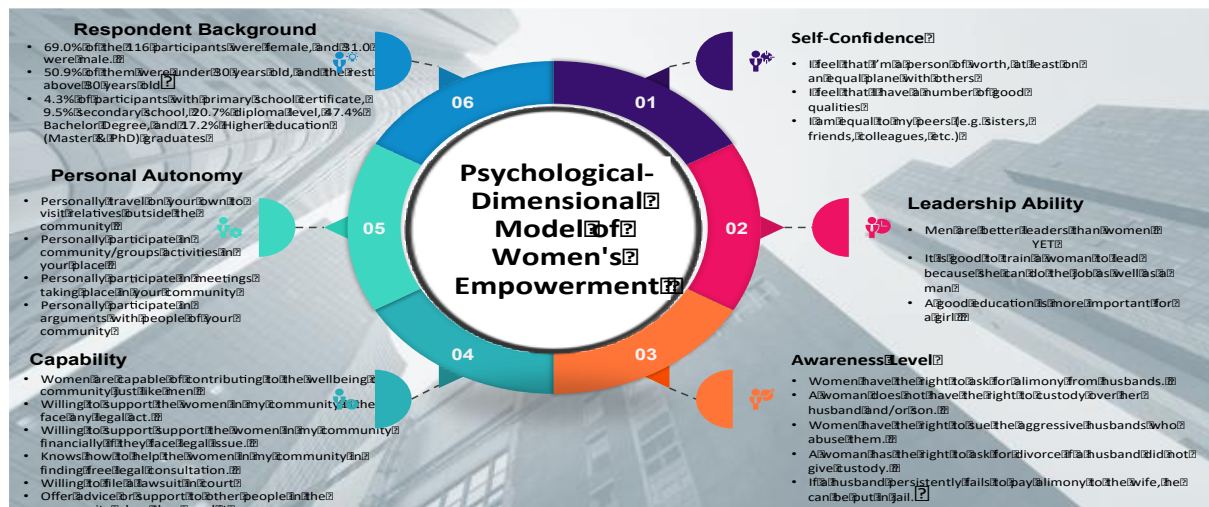


Fig. 2. The Psychological-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment

### Conclusion

Equality and empowerment are the biggest challenges encountered by women in the world that strongly affect their confidence level and ability to make decisions. The study did not focus on the reasons, which culture could be one of them, but on the five domains of the psychological-dimensional model of women's empowerment; the "self-confidence," "ability in leadership," "awareness of their rights," "their capability," and "personal autonomy" and the dynamic relations between them, particularly in the context of Malaysia. The findings of this study indicate that high self-confidence; leadership abilities, autonomy, awareness, and capability are the main dimensions of women's empowerment. Many research works have studied the importance of Psychological-Dimension of Women's Empowerment in relation to empowerment. Generally, women who have high capability, leadership ability, personal autonomy, confidence level, and awareness of their rights can lead and this is also true for women in Malaysia. Undeniably, it is important to extend women's visibility by coaching them to become leaders with the decision-making abilities in achieving the best for themselves and the country. Indeed, among the five psychological dimensions of women's empowerment, a capability is identified as the core dimension that increases the level of women's empowerment followed by leadership ability, personal autonomy, confidence level, and finally awareness of women's rights. This enables the researcher to introduce the psychological-dimensional model of women's empowerment. The study also reports on the demographic characteristics; it discovered that women's characteristics are important elements that significantly influence the psychological dimensions of empowerment among women in Malaysia. The impact of these demographic attributes of the respondents is addressed in relation to self-confidence, leadership abilities, autonomy, awareness, and capability. Indeed, education and income levels play an important role in women's self-confidence. Whereas, age, marital status, and income level play an important role in women's awareness of their rights. Besides, education level strengthens leadership ability. While age, education level, employment sector, and monthly income increase compatibility level. Last but not least, age, educational level, and monthly income intensify personal autonomy. The findings also revealed that amongst the five psychological magnitudes of empowerment,

capability is identified as the core dimension that increases the level of women's empowerment followed by leadership ability, personal autonomy, confidence level, and lastly, Women's awareness of their rights.

In conclusion, the proposed psychological-dimensional model of women empowerment provides an avenue for researchers in understanding women's psychological needs. Efforts toward psychological empowerment of women in these five domains as of "self-confidence," "ability in leadership," "awareness of their rights," "their capability," and "personal autonomy" are all effective, especially in societies where they call for women's equality and non-discrimination, this matter is of significant importance. Indeed, this is essential so that appropriate recommendations on the next course of action can be proposed to stakeholders on how to fill in the psychological gender gap in the future. Rigorous evidence of women's autonomy and participation in the community can provide valuable information so that more effective policies and programs can be formulated, deliberated, and implemented. This model is regarded as a contribution in applying the empowerment concept from a psychological point of view and it can be a basis for researchers to examine the relationship within the perspectives of intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components of Psychological Empowerment for different populations in different settings.

### **Contribution of The Study**

The low level of women's participation in decision-making justifies the need for this research. The findings of the research are expected to validate the five domains of the psychological-dimensional model of women's empowerment as of "self-confidence," "ability in leadership," "awareness of their rights," "their capability," and "personal autonomy" and the dynamic relations between them, particularly in the context of Malaysia. This is because the literature provides evidence that the assessments of psychological empowerment based on these dimensions were conducted in segregated manners. In addition, this research is expected to have academic implications, which expand the body of knowledge through empirical evidence on the measurement of variables involved.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors hereby declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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