

# Correlation of Stress Coping Strategies and Social Compromise with Empowerment through Cognitive Emotion Regulation Mediation in Head-of-Household Women

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## Abstract

**Background:** Social compromise is one of the principal components of mental health in head-of-household women. Empowerment and promotion of cognitive emotion regulation are critical in social compromise. The present study aimed to investigate the correlation between stress coping strategies and social compromise with empowerment through the mediation role of cognitive emotion regulation in head-of-household women.

**Methods:** In this descriptive and correlational study, the statistical population comprises all head-of-household women in Yasuj, Iran in 2021, of whom 258 were selected through convenient sampling. The research instruments included the Psychological Empowerment Scale, the Adjustment Inventory, Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations, and the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the statistical correlation method and structural equation modeling in SPSS and AMOS version 25.

**Results:** The mean and standard deviation of social compromise, problem-focused strategies, emotion-focused strategies, avoidance strategies, adaptive emotion regulation, maladaptive emotion regulation, and empowerment were  $14.22 \pm 4.60$ ,  $16.11 \pm 4.71$ ,  $22.02 \pm 5.16$ ,  $23.65 \pm 4.88$ ,  $25.35 \pm 10.19$ ,  $20.34 \pm 8.14$ , and  $39.25 \pm 10.84$ , respectively. The results showed a significant correlation between stress-coping strategies and social compromise with empowerment ( $P < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, the correlation between stress coping strategies and social compromise with empowerment was significant through the mediation of cognitive emotion regulation ( $P < 0.001$ ). The results showed that the final model fit well (CFI=0.99, RMSEA=0.028).

**Conclusion:** The proposed model had a desirable fitting. The head-of-household women who have social compromise when facing problems can deal with the stress caused by problems through sympathy and consulting with others, as well as using stress coping strategies, and as a result of this empowerment, they enjoy sufficient mental health.

**Keywords:** Psychological stress, Psychological adaptation, Empowerment, Emotions, Women

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## 1. Introduction

As half of the human resources, in addition to being the subject and purpose of development, women are influential factors in accomplishing development goals (1). Lack of proper mental health in them can cause a malfunction in society (2). The number of female heads of households is increasing by the day. The increase in the divorce rate, definite celibacy, and immigration are among the reasons for this issue. Problems such as being sponsorless and divorce in women have caused mental and behavioral disorders, including aggression, incompatibility with the environment, family, and children, low self-concept and self-efficacy, felony, depression, and inability to manage their lives (3). Social compromise and support, as well as strategies to cope with stress in women, enable them to develop self-confidence and a sense of

security (4). Self-efficacy and empowerment play a crucial role in determining the type of coping styles adopted by an individual in stressful situations (5). Lack of access to the relative level of welfare and the substantial gap between their status and the indices of social welfare such as health, education, skills, low per capita income, and social and financial restrictions has led to their deprivation. Consequently, it gradually threatens their lives and those under their care (6). Thus, empowering this group of women is crucial in enabling them to face their problems.

Compromise is one of the variables that can boost the empowerment of head-of-household women. The adjustment refers to the capability of an individual to adjust to their environment. It has disparate dimensions such as social, family, emotional, health, and academic (7). Any human

being, consciously or subconsciously, seeks to meet their various and sometimes conflicting needs in his environment. Given that they are required to meet their needs within the framework of social structure, it is considered social adjustment. Compromising with new and different situations is quite difficult, especially in times of stress and rapid social changes (8). According to studies, any life changes, either pleasant or unpleasant, requires readjustment (9, 10). Adjustment is one of the main signs of mental health. Its importance in all aspects of life, including personal, family, occupational, and social, is obvious.

Furthermore, by compromising with other conditions, humans reduce their anxiety, stress, and depression, preserve their mental health, and provide the basis for their success (11). Compromise can be crucial in exhibiting positive behaviors in the head-of-household women. Several studies pointed out the correlation between adjustment and psychological empowerment, as well as the correlation between social support and psychological empowerment (12-14).

The high-stress level of female heads of the household can affect the empowerment of these women (15). Therefore, stress-coping strategies can help them to reduce stress. Coping methods are employed as a psychological process concerning individuals' cognitive and behavioral efforts to inhibit, reduce, or endure internal and external demands (16). Stress coping strategies include three following dimensions: Problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping strategies. Problem-focused coping strategies are methods in which an individual calculates actions needed to reduce or remove a factor causing stress. Problem-focused behaviors include seeking more information about the problem, changing the cognitive structure of the problem, and prioritizing the steps to focus on the problem.

On the other hand, emotion-focused coping strategies are the methods through which an individual emphasizes oneself and makes every effort to reduce unpleasant effects. Emotion-focused coping reactions include crying, getting angry, mental preoccupation, and daydreaming. Avoidance coping strategies require cognitive activities and changes that aim to avoid stressful situations. Avoidance coping strategies might emerge as starting a new activity, getting

involved with it, or socializing (17). Regarding the empowerment approach concerning women's work, several studies indicated that this plan increases their participation in social programs, preserves balance in their interactions, and creates a sense of hope for the future (18).

Head-of-family women face financial, emotional, and psychological problems and experience higher anxiety and stress levels. Consequently, they experience rapid mood swings that can affect their beliefs regarding their abilities and reduce their feelings of enjoying life. Head-of-household women undergo higher levels of stress in comparison to married women (19). Despite cultural alterations and changes in the methods of living, most individuals, particularly head-of-household women, lack the essential abilities and required skills to face particular problems in their lives. Accordingly, this group of women is more vulnerable when facing problems, and it reduces their mental health (20). Furthermore, stress leads to immense mental distress, especially in this group of women. Cognitive emotion regulation is among the approaches that can effectively control these distresses. Emotion is a multifaceted phenomenon with evolutionary, behavioral, cognitive, and communicative functions. Emotion regulation is concerned with the processes during which individuals seek to modify the processes related to the generation of emotion, which is usually associated with the goal of reducing the severity of emotional experiences. In other words, cognitive emotion regulation is defined as a method through which individuals experience, control, and express their emotions (21, 22). Various studies revealed the correlation of empowerment with self-controlling and self-regulation and empowerment with cognitive emotion regulation (23, 24).

Being head of the household is a challenging role for women. In addition, mothers are responsible for making decisions regarding children's mental, social, emotional, academic, and behavioral problems in the future. She is the one who should try to maintain the system of emotional relationships in the family, prevent the minimum tensions in the family, and support her children both financially and spiritually. Based on this, it is necessary to adopt stress coping strategies, cognitive emotion regulation, social compromise, and management when they or their children face stressful situations. Therefore,

according to the background of the research, the present study aimed to investigate the correlation of stress-coping strategies and social compromise with empowerment through the mediation role of cognitive emotion regulation in head-of-household women. The conceptual model of the research, including the correlation between stress-coping strategies (problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance strategies) and social compromise with the empowerment of head-of-household women through the mediating role of adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation; it is presented in Figure 1.

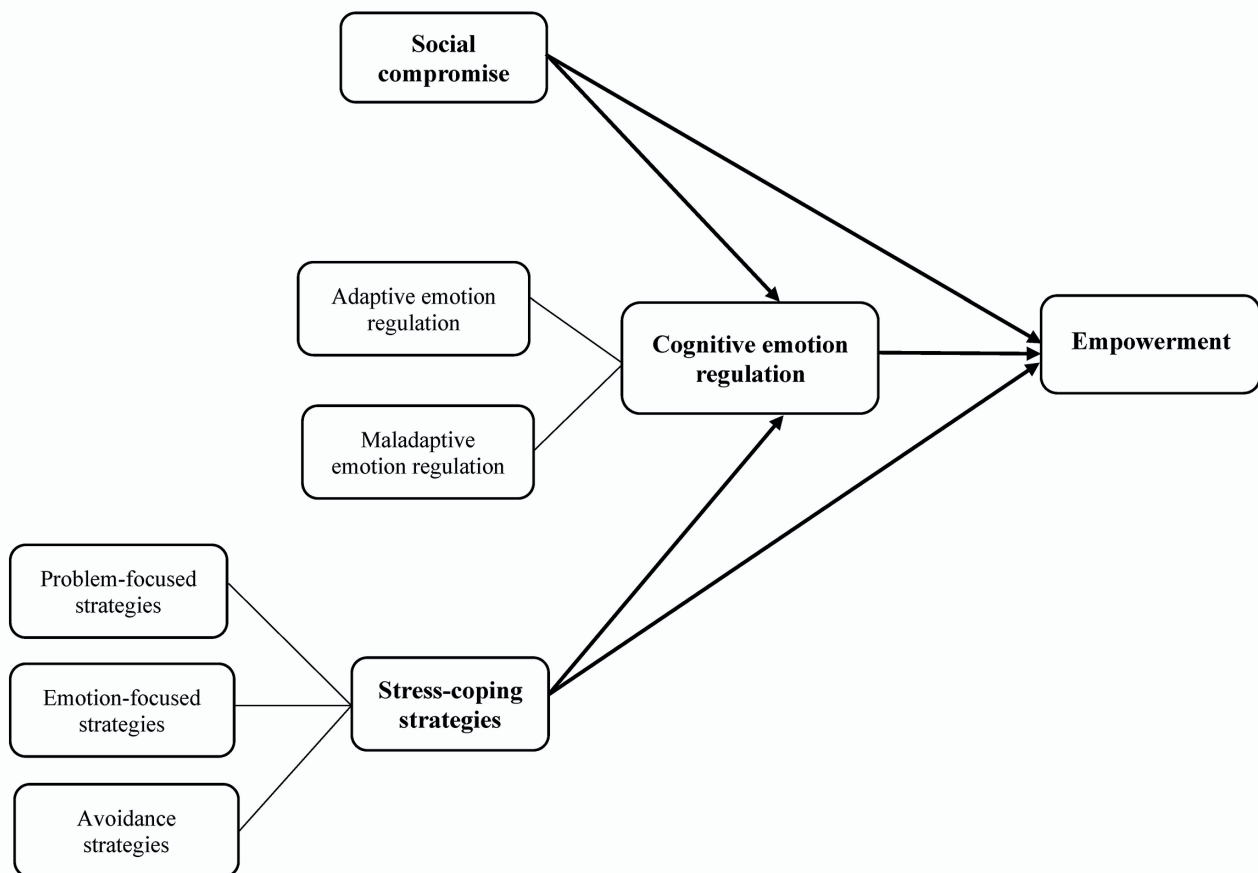
## 2. Methods

This descriptive and correlational study was carried out through the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. The statistical population of this research includes all head-of-household women in Yasuj, Iran in 2021. Considering that in the correlational studies, the study population should be between 15 and 25 people for each variable, the sample size of this research was 258 head-of-household women selected through convenient sampling. The

inclusion criteria include head-of-household women, full consent of the volunteers to participate in the study, and lack of support (due to disability, death, being in hiding, or divorce). The exclusion criteria are failure to complete all questionnaires and unwillingness to continue cooperation.

### 2.1. Instruments

**The Adjustment Inventory:** This form contains 160 questions. It measures the lack of compromise based on five scales, i.e., home, health, emotions, job, and social. Each dimension consists of 32 questions. The social adjustment dimension in this questionnaire has 32 items and classifies individuals into strong, moderate, and weak levels. The options include yes, no, and I don't know. In this test, merely yes and no answers were scored. Yes scored one, and no scored zero. A low score on this indicator demonstrates better social adjustment (25). Cheraghi and NematTavousi (26) reported that the Persian version of this questionnaire has good quantitative validity (Content Validity Index (CVI)=0.94, and Content Validity Ratio (CVR)=0.93). The reliability of the Persian version of the scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.79 (26).



**Figure 1:** The figure shows the conceptual model of the research.

**Psychological Empowerment Scale:** The variable of empowerment was measured using the Psychological Empowerment Scale, which has five components: competence, self-determination, impact, meaning, and trust. This scale constitutes 15 items questions, and is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree) (27). The CVR and CVI of the Persian version of the scale were reported as 0.90 and 0.93, respectively (28). The reliability of the Persian version of the scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82 (28).

**Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations:** The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations is a self-report tool developed by Calsbeek and colleagues (29) under the principal coping inventory for stressful situations. This scale has 21 items and evaluates problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance as three main coping styles. Each stress-coping style in this scale comprises seven articles. Answers in each item are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 for very little and 5 for very much (29). The validity of the Persian version of the questionnaire was confirmed by ten experts (CVR=0.94, CVI=0.93) (30). The reliability of the Persian version of the scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82 (30).

**The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ):** The main version of the cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire was designed by Garnefski and Kraaij (31). It was used to identify cognitive coping strategies of individuals after experiencing negative events or situations. The short Persian version of the cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire designed by Hasani (32) comprises 18 articles as a self-report tool. The scores of this questionnaire range from (1) rarely to (5) almost always. The subscales of this questionnaire assess adaptive and maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation, with nine items for each. The range of scores for each subscale is between nine and 45. With a CVI of 0.96 and a CVR of 0.98, the validity of the Persian version of the CERQ was verified (32).

The reliability of the Persian version of the scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.92 (32).

## 2.2. Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical methods such as mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation coefficient were employed to analyze the data. To confirm the normality of the data, kurtosis and skewness test, as well as structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques, were used to evaluate the model. SPSS and AMOS 25 software were used for data analysis.

## 3. Results

The participants in the present study included 258 head-of-household women with a mean age of  $38.25 \pm 6.42$  years. The demographic variables of the women are presented in Table 1. Before investigating the hypotheses, the characteristics of descriptive statistics of research variables were examined with the mean, standard deviation (SD), and minimum and maximum scores. Table 1 shows these results. Kurtosis and skewness tests were used to determine the normality of the data. Following the results, the kurtosis and skewness of the research variables range between (-2) to (2). Thus, the hypothesis of the data's normality was confirmed (Table 2).

The Pearson correlation coefficient between research variables is presented in Table 3. The results indicated a significant correlation between variables (Table 3).

Table 4 shows the fitting of the proposed model following the fitting indices. According to the results, all fitting indices such as the values of chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), normed chi-square index, normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) manifested the proper fitting of the

**Table 1:** Demographic variables of the head-of-household women

Demographic variables	n	%
Age (years)	25-35	20.16
	35-45	49.61
	45-55	30.23
Education	Middle School	28.29
	High School	51.55
	College Education	20.16

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variables		Mean±SD	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social compromise		14.22±4.60	3	30	0.65	0.37
Coping strategies for stressful situations	Problem-focused strategies	16.11±4.71	7	29	-0.56	0.50
	Emotion-focused strategies	22.02±5.16	7	35	-0.95	1.26
	Avoidance strategies	23.65±4.88	8	35	0.39	-0.57
Cognitive emotion regulation	Adaptive emotion regulation	25.35±10.19	10	40	0.54	-0.90
	Maladaptive emotion regulation	20.34±8.14	9	39	-0.52	-0.71
Empowerment		39.25±10.84	16	65	0.58	0.70

**Table 3:** Pearson correlation coefficient between research variables

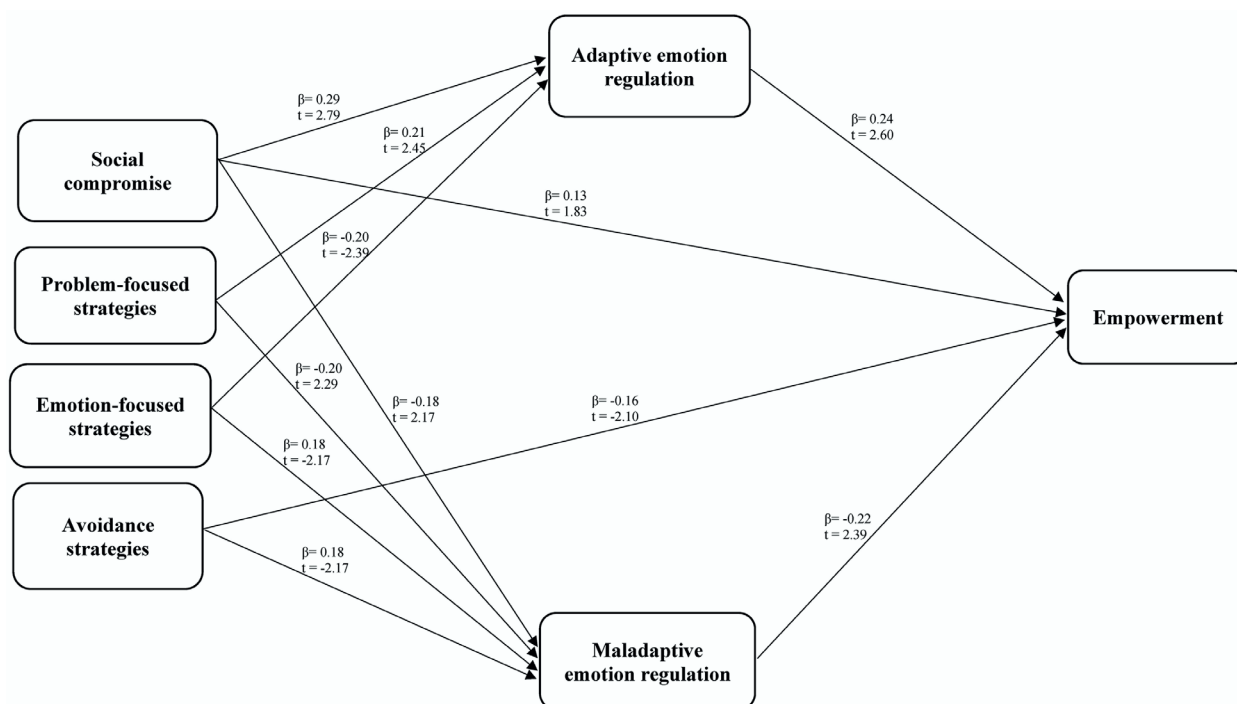
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1- Social compromise	1						
2- Problem-focused strategies	0.30**	1					
3- Emotion-focused strategies	-0.21**	-0.12	1				
4- Avoidance strategies	-0.26**	-0.20**	0.41**	1			
5- Adaptive emotion regulation	0.39**	0.32**	-0.28**	-0.26**	1		
6- Maladaptive emotion regulation	-0.32**	-0.31**	0.32**	0.34**	-0.26**	1	
7- Empowerment	0.33**	0.29**	-0.23**	-0.33**	-0.38**	-0.37**	1

\*\*P<0.01

**Table 4:** Fitting the final model based on fit indices

Fit indicators	$\chi^2$	df	( $\chi^2/df$ )	IFI	TLI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Proposed model	7.96	4	1.99	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.98	0.028

IFI: Incremental Fit Index; TLI: Tucker–Lewis index; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; NFI: Normed Fit Index; RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation



**Figure 2:** The figure shows the proposed model related to the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation in the correlation between stress-coping strategies and social compromise with empowerment.

proposed model with the data. Figure 2 shows the standardized path coefficients in the final model.

Table 5 displays the model’s standardized path coefficients and their significance level. The results

showed that the direct association between research variables was statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ).

The bootstrap command in AMOS was used to examine the mediating role of cognitive emotion

**Table 5:** Standard path coefficient related to the direct association between variables in the proposed model

Direct paths	Proposed model	
	$\beta$	P
Maladaptive emotion regulation → Problem-focused strategies	-0.20	0.001
Adaptive emotion regulation → Social compromise	0.29	0.001
Adaptive emotion regulation → Problem-focused strategies	0.21	0.001
Adaptive emotion regulation → Emotion-focused strategies	-0.20	0.001
Maladaptive emotion regulation → Avoidance strategies	0.18	0.004
Maladaptive emotion regulation → Social compromise	-0.18	0.003
Maladaptive emotion regulation → Emotion-focused strategies	0.18	0.004
Empowerment → Maladaptive emotion regulation	-0.22	0.001
Empowerment → Adaptive emotion regulation	0.24	0.001
Empowerment → Social compromise	0.13	0.040
Empowerment → Avoidance strategies	-0.16	0.006

**Table 6:** Estimation of indirect paths in the proposed model

Indirect paths	Proposed model	
	$\beta$	P
Avoidance strategies for empowerment through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation	-0.087	0.005
Emotion-focused strategies for empowerment through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation	-0.178	0.001
Problem-focused strategies for empowerment through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation	0.210	0.001
Social compromise to empowerment through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation	0.248	0.001

regulation among the research variables (Table 6). Following the results, cognitive emotion regulation was able to mediate the association of empowerment with avoidance ( $\beta=-0.087$ ,  $P=0.005$ ), emotion-focused strategies ( $\beta=-0.178$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and problem-focused strategies ( $\beta=0.210$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and it mediated the association between social compromise and empowerment ( $\beta=0.248$ ,  $P<0.001$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between stress-coping strategies and social compromise with empowerment through the mediation role of cognitive emotion regulation in head-of-household women. The results suggested that the model of the causal association of empowerment based on social compromise and stress-coping strategies through the mediation of cognitive emotion regulation in head-of-household women has a desirable fitting.

Based on the results, empowerment had a positive and direct relationship with adaptive regulation. However, empowerment was negatively correlated with maladaptive regulation, which is consistent with the findings of Turns and co-

workers (23). They concluded that empowerment could boost self-controlling and self-regulation in individuals. Another study by Mehmannaava and colleagues (24) revealed that empowerment increased the use of acceptance, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, and adopting viewpoint cognitive strategies and decreased the use of self-blame and rumination cognitive strategies. One of the reasons and explanations regarding the effect of intervention concerning empowerment is that most of these interventions cause changes in people's behavioral styles. It appears that through assessing the threat level in a stressful situation, empowerment causes changes in individuals' behavioral styles and emotions in the course of the incident. Empowerment reduces the threat level in the assessment and boosts individuals' expectations that their endeavors will succeed (23). People with higher levels of hardiness can deal with stress in more effective ways. In addition, they reregulate and reinterpret their contradicting experiences. In critical and stressful situations, capable and resilient individuals can use positive emotions and reduce negative emotions to achieve balance and a suitable state to solve their problems.

The results suggested that cognitive emotion regulation correlated with problem-focused,

emotion-focused, and avoidance strategies. This finding corresponded to the results of Duffley and Larrivé (33). They indicated that adjustment increases appropriate coping strategies in individuals and improves their subjective well-being. In other words, the higher the adjustment, the higher the level of decision-making power in particular situations, and the easier the response to difficult situations. It is probably due to the nature of emotion and emotion-focused strategy. Emotion-focused strategy is a type of emotional response to stressful accidents. Despite a problem-focused strategy, the response of people who do not see the stressful issue as a solvable one feels that they have little control over resolving it. The feeling of being weak or lack of control might lead to more rumination (33). Moreover, enjoying cognitive emotion regulation, such as proper attention, concentration, and reasoning concerning emotion management, can increase self-efficacy, hardiness, hope, and positive thinking in individuals during progress.

The results revealed that maladaptive emotion regulation had a negative correlation with social compromise, and adaptive emotion regulation positively correlated with social compromise. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kwon and co-workers (34). They revealed that teaching emotion regulation could improve judgment and boost social self-efficacy regarding social compromise, emotions, education, and helping behaviors. The research by Mu and colleagues (35) indicated that teaching emotion management skills could increase social and emotional skills. In addition, social adjustment and social sufficiency will be improved, and aggression will be reduced. Even in situations that are not appealing to the individual, adaptive emotion regulation strategies can help individuals stay in control and respond to different social situations more flexibly. This ability can lead to preserving sustainable social interactions and social adjustment.

Furthermore, it can be argued that one of the characteristics of adjusting individuals is that they think about the consequences of their decisions and affairs. The use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies enables them to contemplate more about the outcomes of their actions. Accordingly, it can reduce interpersonal conflicts and promote social compromise.

Following the results, a social compromise

positively correlated with the empowerment of head-of-household women. Moreover, the results suggested that emotional regulations mediate between social compromise and empowerment. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies (12-14). Rahimi-Dadkan and Nastiezaie (12) found a positive association between adjustment and psychological empowerment. Ture and Akkoc (13) reported a correlation between these two variables. Mello and Schmink (14) revealed that women's empowerment can boost their capacity to better manage their houses and access more resources and improve decision-making powers. The most prominent purpose of cognitive emotion regulation is to enable individuals to precisely interpret social signs, manage their affects, successfully overcome social challenges, and accomplish their goals. When cognitive emotional self-regulation is employed, it reveals particular motivation that compels individuals to do their best.

Sometimes, cognitive emotion regulation is an intentional action to follow social rules whereby people manage and modify their emotions to accomplish personal and social goals. Thus, it can be argued that emotion regulation effectively follows the norms of groups and societies and increases social compromise. As the capability to control emotions and behaviors in interpersonal relationships, self-control considerably overlaps with the definition of emotion regulation based on controlling the experiences and expressing emotions to accomplish long-term results (36). Individuals who use adaptive emotion regulation strategies can exert more control over their feelings and prevent impulsive action in their interpersonal relationships and as a result, exhibit more social compromise. These strategies enable individuals to control their feelings and adapt to their environment more effectively (37). The use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies are associated with failure in correctly processing cognitive information. Thus, using these strategies increases behavioral problems and reduces social compromise. Social compromise is one of the principal components of mental health in head-of-household women. Empowerment and promotion of cognitive emotion regulation are crucially important in social compromise.

According to the results, avoidance and emotion-focused strategies negatively correlated with empowerment. However, problem-focused

strategies had a positive and significant correlation with empowerment. In addition, the results suggested that cognitive emotion regulation mediates the correlation of empowerment with emotion-focused, problem-focused, and avoidance strategies. This finding corresponds with the conclusions of East and Roll (18). In their research concerning sponsorless women's empowerment in work, they demonstrated that this plan boosted self-efficacy, participation in social programs, the feeling of power, and their balance in interactions in generating the feeling of being hopeful about the future (18). Accordingly, it can be argued that good self-regulation includes planning, reliability, attention, concentration, foresight, self-monitoring, and success with an active problem-solving attitude. However, poor self-regulation includes distraction, restlessness, concentration at the moment, avoidance/withdrawal coping methods, irritability/nervousness, and inability to postpone satisfaction. When individuals undergo psychological distress, they can respond to their mood using various methods. They might deny their effects, avoid thinking about how they feel, quickly change their environment, change their mood, or they might ruminate, lay blame, or start catastrophizing. In this case, problem-solving thinking is reduced, and the person adopts an avoidant coping style by using these strategies. However, using adaptive cognitive strategies when facing problems can result in positive emotional results and problem-solving.

#### 4.1. Limitations

The statistical population of this research was limited to head-of-household women. Consequently, generalizing the data to society must be carried out with caution. To conduct more productive research, it is recommended to use other research tools in addition to questionnaires to investigate and assess the model to decrease the limitation of carrying out single-dimension research. It is suggested that future studies be conducted on head-of-household women in other cities with different socio-cultural structures.

## 5. Conclusions

In general, the results suggested that social compromise and stress coping strategies correlated with empowerment, and social compromise and stress coping strategies correlated with adaptive

and maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation. Furthermore, social compromise and stress coping strategies had an indirect association with the head-of-household women's empowerment through the mediation of cognitive emotion regulation. Therefore, concerning the importance of this research, it is recommended to emphasize psychological and educational programs such as stress coping strategies and social compromise and provide appropriate training to boost empowerment in head-of-household women.

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## Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Islamic Azad University- Ahvaz Branch with the code of IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1400.100. Also, written informed consent was obtained from the participants.

**Conflict of Interest:** None declared.

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