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Understanding women's empowerment: The interplay between personal and relational empowerment

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Throughout history and across nations still today, men on average are superior to women in terms of power.¹ Especially in developing nations patriarchy and gender inequality are still prevalent.²

Empowering women is seen as important step to accelerate economic development^{3,4} and as one of the central issues in the process of sustainable development for many nations worldwide⁵

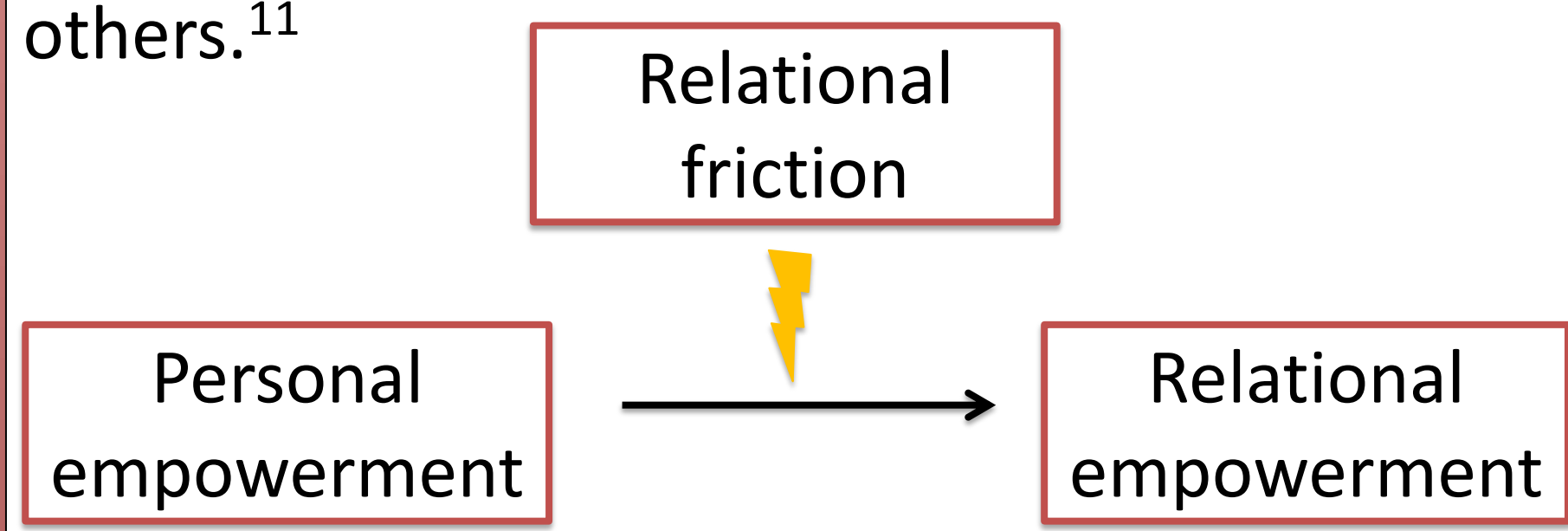
This research defines women's empowerment and investigates the relation between different dimensions.



Personal & Relational empowerment

Economic development alone cannot result in the development of women's empowerment.^{3,4} To achieve change towards more equality, both parties of the relationship need to be involved.⁹

The pathways through which the process of women's empowerment occurs it shaped by specific contexts¹⁰ and strongly influenced by laws, social norms and cultural practices.³ People in collectivistic societies give meaning to their identity through relationships with others.¹¹



Women's empowerment

"The expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437)⁶

Women's empowerment entails a process from being un-empowered to becoming empowered^{6,7}

The Three-Dimensional Women's Empowerment Model proposes that women's empowerment can be differentiated at three distinct dimensions:

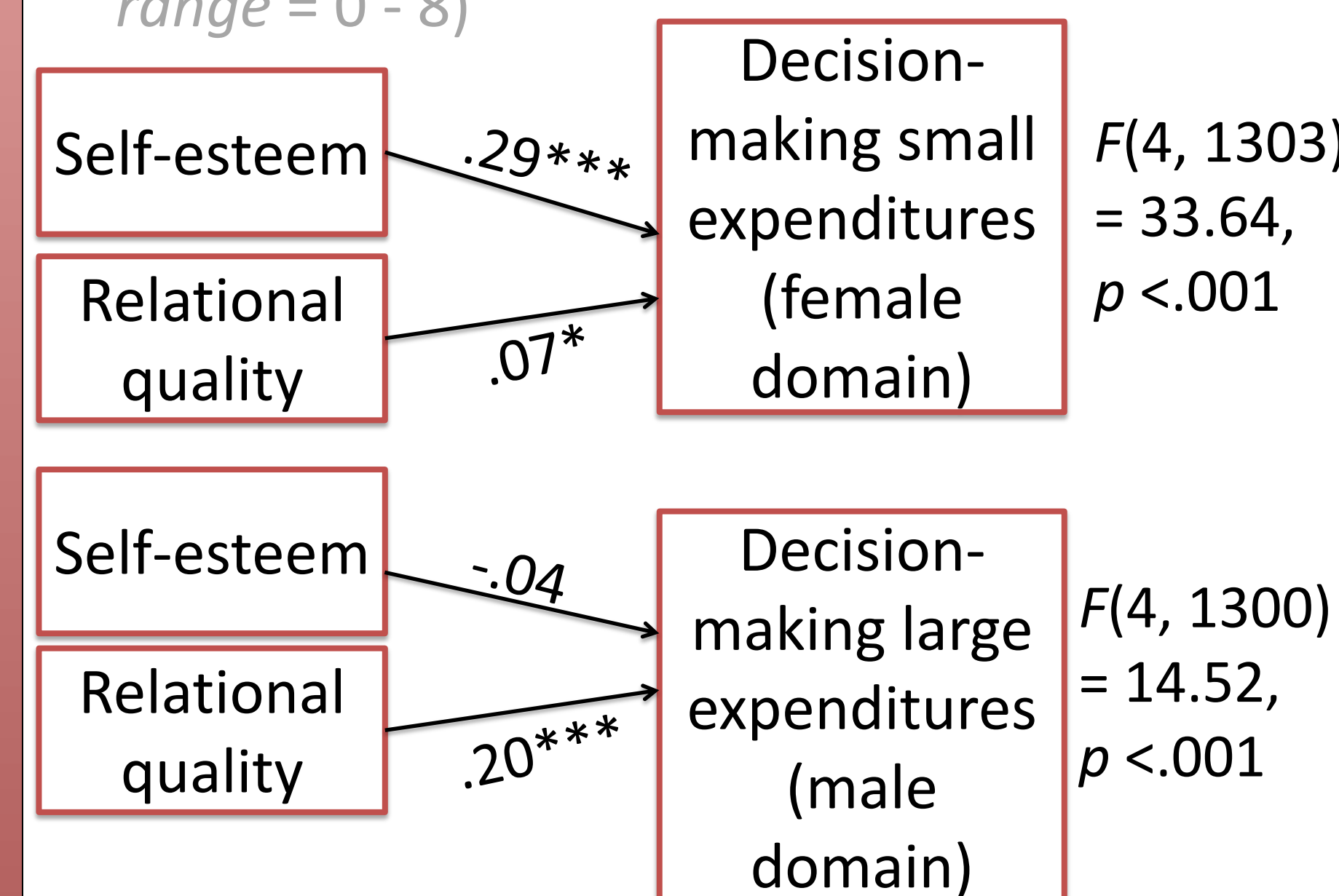
- ❖ the micro-level: personal empowerment - individuals' personal beliefs and actions
- ❖ the meso-level: relational empowerment - beliefs and actions in relation to relevant others
- ❖ the macro-level: societal empowerment - outcomes in the broader societal context⁸

Study

Sample: 1509 Vietnamese female entrepreneurs ($M_{age} = 44.7, SD = 10.0$)

Main measures:

- **Self-esteem** (Rosenberg, 1965) e.g., I am able to do things as well as most other people (6 items; $M = 3.72, SD = 0.68, range = 1 - 5$)
- **Relational quality** (Straus, 1979; WHO, 2005) e.g., How often did your spouse physically assault you in the last six months? (Reversed: 4 items; $M = 4.65, SD = 0.41, range = 1 - 5$)
- **Decision making power** (Banerjee et al., 2015) Small expenditures: e.g., Who makes most decisions about what food items to purchase? (3 items; $M = 2.42, SD = 0.69, range = 0 - 3$) Large expenditures: e.g., Who makes most decisions about where to invest surplus money? (8 items; $M = 4.08, SD = 1.58, range = 0 - 8$)



Controlling for age and educational level

Conclusion

- To understand women's empowerment it is important to differentiate between personal, relational, and societal dimensions.
- Relational dynamics are crucial in the development of women's empowerment.

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