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The role of close relationships in the development of women empowerment

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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 worldwide[5]

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

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 context[8]

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 contexts[10] 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]
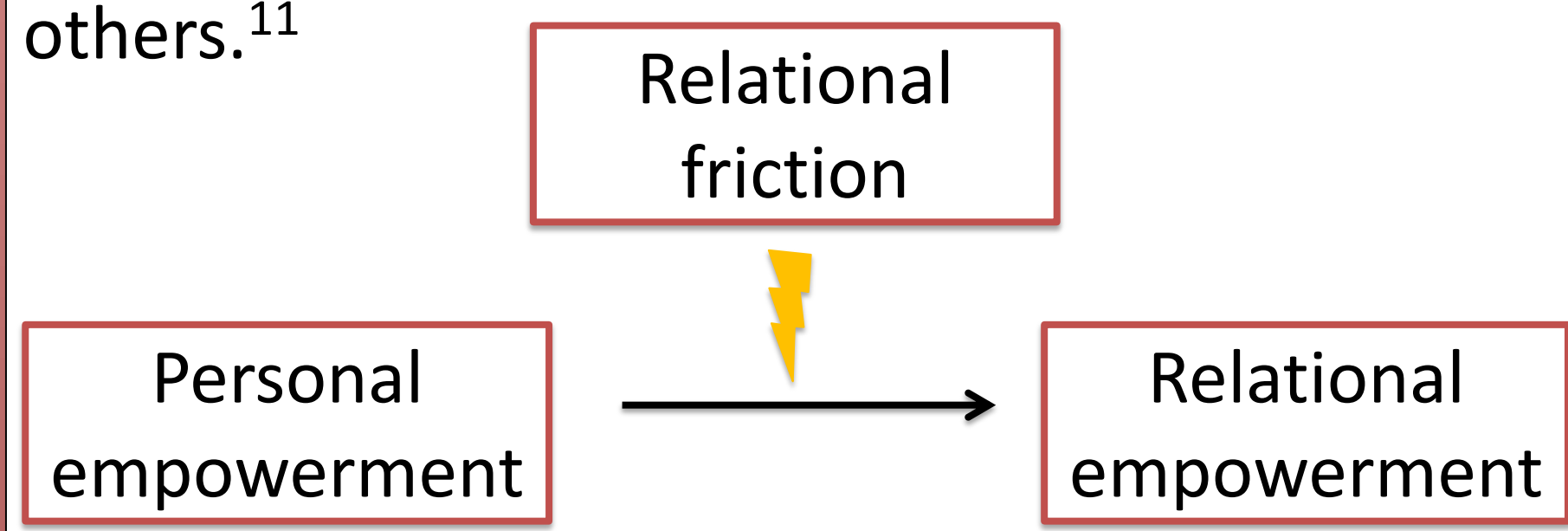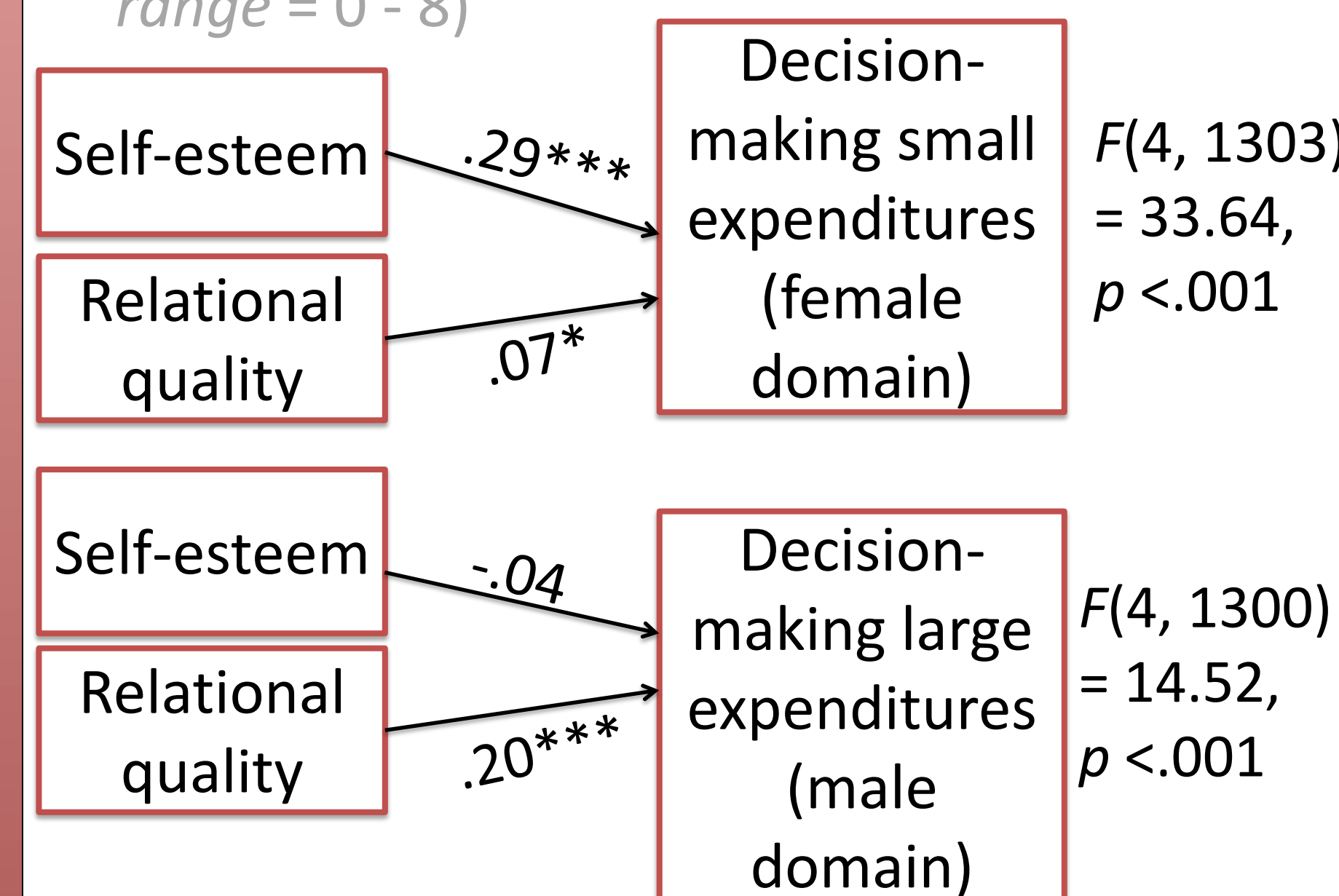

Study

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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