Study of the Situation of Women Heads of Households in Natural Disasters, (Kermanshah 2017 Earthquake)

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Abstract: Headed household women are among vulnerable and forgotten social groups in natural disasters, and cultural circumstances and gender-related issues affect how they manage the disasters. On the other hand, the agency will also be important in this encounter. This study examines the lived experience of the headed household women in Kermanshah from this perspective in the 2017 earthquake to provide a background model for "the process of empowerment of headed household women in natural disasters." This study was conducted based on the qualitative approach and research method of grounded theory. Theoretical sampling and in-depth interviews with 15 headed household women in the eight areas of the earthquake in Kermanshah, including Thalas Babajani, Sarpol-e Zahab, etc. have been performed to a degree of theoretical saturation in order to collect field data. 363 primary concepts, 20 major categories, and the central concept of "intensifier of disabling social foundations" have emerged from coding the data and using the grounded theory method. The phenomenon of "Capacity poverty - the threat of opportunities" (disabled women) caused by value systems and repressive ideologies dominated in the field of study, poor crisis management, poverty and deprivation in the region, and lack of technical knowledge and skills of participants that resulted in strategies of active action and social resilience and compromise. This study's findings show some consequences caused by the constructed phenomenon, helplessness and indifference, power challenges, threats and insecurity, feelings of abandonment, physical and psychological injuries, and children's challenge. The results determine that the process of "empowerment" of the headed household women in the appearance of natural disasters is conditional on conditions such as that opportunities to be obtainable through support structures and social barriers and restraints to be not so threatening and powerful as to prevent opportunities and cause deprivation of capabilities and they also consider themselves qualified to "agency".

Keywords: the headed household women, agency, disabling social foundations, capacity poverty, empowerment, earthquake, lived experience.

Introduction
Natural disasters have no equal effect on social groups. A gender vulnerability approach to disasters indicates that inequality at risk, sensitivity to risk, inequality in access to resources, capacities, and opportunities systematically exclude some groups and puts them more at risk of natural disasters (Plümper & Neumayer 2007). Earthquake as a natural disaster is not solely a natural and geological event, but also considered as a "social event" that covers many social issues and phenomena because, after the accident, social and individual phenomena appear without masks. The system of social control breaks down at least for a while. Accordingly, it makes crisis control and management obligatory in proportionate with the different involved and vulnerable social groups (Piran, 2003: 30-48). According to a report published by the Canadian Red Cross, women are one of the ten groups who are at-risk in emergency conditions (Bahman et al., 2017), and Headed Household Women are one of the most minor and vulnerable social groups who often are marginalized. They suffer more pressure due to a lack of

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access to opportunities and resources in emergency situations. This social group is frequently neglected in disasters and is viewed on an equal level with others, while, they require more support compared to other women because of their special situation.

Gender has an important position in post-disaster vulnerability, and women are exposed to harm due to a range of factors that indicate fundamental social trends. Being a woman and the head of the household may not produce special vulnerability, but these same fundamental social processes, power mechanisms, and institutionalized gender perspectives make them have a particular vulnerability. It should be regarded that the type of women's vulnerability is highly related to the socio-cultural context and gender-related issues in a crisis condition. Although headed household women do their best to perform their multiple roles, that prejudgments, cultural prejudices, and power mechanisms that habitually institutionalize gender images in women and depriving them of the agency are a severe obstacle to access to resources and realize their needs and their children, that its consequences are displayed in all fields of life. As international statistics show that women manage 37% of the world's families. According to the results of the general population and housing censuses during the years 1976 to 2016, the number of headed household women has increased from 490536 people with an increase of 6.21 times to 3061753 households in 2016 (Ghorbani, 2018). In fact, women had a share of (12.7%) in the head of households in 2016 that has had a notable growth compared to other census periods (Population and Housing Census, 2016).

The above statistics explain that there is a rapid growth of the phenomenon of "family with a female head" in recent decades. This phenomenon is more concerned when we understand 43.2% of headed households' women are in the first and second deciles of income compared to the population in terms of economy and income in Iran (General Population and Housing Census 2011). This number is much more distinguished and higher than the first two deciles of men, i.e. 16.8, and this has turned them into the most miserable of the poor so that women's poverty is recognized equal to the poverty of headed households’ women in the new paradigm in the discussion of poverty (Shaditalab, 1993). And this social group should be empowered because of the mentioned problem. Hence, since women are responsible for the direct charge and burden of these families alone, it is highly important to plan and recognize proper policies to support, advocate, and empower these women in crisis situations. But contrary to the growing statistics and rates of headed households’ women, unhappily, we encounter not only a lack of sociological research on this social group in natural disasters in Iran, but also, we considerably feel a lack of policies, laws and support and relief bills “at crisis and natural disasters of this social group among the laws. As this vulnerable group of society and their special needs with a gender management approach have not addressed and discussed clearly and explicitly in the latest law on crisis management of the country dated 3/6/2019 by the Islamic Consultative Assembly entitled "Bill of Management of Unexpected Disasters in the Country".

An earthquake measuring 7.4 on the Richter scale hit a large part of the west of the country on November 21, 2017, and caused large human and financial damage. In particular, the quake hit eight cities, killed 620 people, injured 9,388, and left more than 70,000 homeless. According to forensic medicine, the number of women who lost their lives in the Kermanshah earthquake had been reported by about 56% and more than men. Kermanshah is one of the less developed provinces in the ranking of provinces in terms of having economic-social indicators (Hosseini; 2020). According to the Statistics Center of Iran, in the autumn of 2019, Kermanshah was ranked first in the country in terms of unemployment with 18.4%, and it was ranked in single digits in the case of divorce. The number of headed household's women in Kermanshah province in 2018 had been higher than the national average (12.7%), and factors such as the death of the head, addiction, divorce, etc., are included. And the specific cultural contexts of the region should be added to these issues. Therefore, this qualitative study with a gender approach analyzes the experience of headed household women as one of the vulnerable groups in natural disasters to achieve the background model of "empowerment of headed household women in Kermanshah in crisis." Hence, the question is how the phenomenon of an earthquake is intellectually understood and interpreted among headed household women in Kermanshah?

Literature Review
We do not have various research background related to natural disasters about headed household women, especially in Iran. We also encounter a lack of qualitative research in this field, and there is an obvious gap between knowledge and research in this field. The results obtained by the research conducted by Kafashi and Kamal al-Dini (2016) from analyzing the content of papers in sociological journals on earthquakes from 2003 to 2015 show that most of the research methods used in the field of earthquakes have been quantitative-survey and less qualitative methods have been used. This research has focused less on the issues and problems of women in disaster regions. However, literature has been reviewed, and related research has been presented in this field. Professor (Gokhale, 2008) from India at the 14th World Conference on Earthquake Engineering says that available inequalities cause mainly women's vulnerability in disasters. Headed household women are particularly vulnerable because they possess fewer resources under their control. In times of crisis, headed household women take more responsibility for food security, housing, and family needs but gain the least support. The study conducted by Enarson (2000) indicates that natural disasters affect highly women's employment and their economic losses caused by disasters can be extensive. Women's responsibility increases distinctly when public support systems and family networks are reduced or eliminated. For all women who gain revenue through domestic work, damaged living spaces mean the loss of workspace, tools, equipment, goods, logistics, and markets. The results of research (Plümper & Neumayer 2007,) with a gender vulnerability approach upon disasters during the years 1981 to 2002 show that inequality at risk and inequality in access to resources [social and personal resources], capacities and opportunities which are shaped in the social form systematically eliminate some groups and expose them to a greater risk of natural disasters. The results of research conducted by Badenjani quoted by (Ghorbani, 2018) explain that headed household women in a stressful situation compared to normal women are more vulnerable to stress.

The Sri Lanka tsunami in 2004 shows that more males are remained in natural disasters compared to females. The notion [because of socio-cultural issues] that women are regarded as the "weaker gender" restricts them from learning the skills required to prevent injury and death. It is essential to notice women's education and participation in decision-making as a power and empowerment tool to defeat the effects of natural disasters. A crisis management system without considering "gender" can only intensify the effects of disasters, particularly for women and girls (Jayarathe, ss. 2014, 125-136). Kumara & et al. (2005) also discovered that less access to information and knowledge of disasters is one of the most significant and effective factors in the women's greater vulnerability in natural disasters created due to less access to information resources. Morrow & Enarson (1998) believe that women's vulnerability in disasters cannot be only rooted in one factor, but several factors are involved. Enarson stated that women's vulnerability in natural disasters is mainly rooted in gender injustice, and points out that the three factors of women's inferiority, ideological barriers, and men's dominance in decision-making in different ways intensify women's vulnerability in disasters. Bhadra (2017) study was conducted on the different effects of disaster on "gender" and gender vulnerabilities that depend on various factors such as the severity of the disaster's effects and domestic socio-cultural perspectives. (Morrow & Enarson 1998) Disaster planning and management, its effects and response, and even investigation on it are inherently social processes. Consequently, the whole world happens and flows in a prejudiced atmosphere against women. Social experience, accidents, relationships reflect the actions and “Gendered social institutions" and the disasters are shown in these completely gendered social systems that are.

**Conceptual Framework**

Qualitative research's conceptual framework involves a set of interrelated concepts that concentrate the main concepts and connect them together in a comprehensible and related semantic system (Mohammadpour 2009: 311-314). Qualitative research employs a conceptual framework, unlike quantitative research, which is according to a theoretical framework for theorizing. Theories in qualitative research play a complementary and inspirational role in the research process and data analysis to create "theoretical-conceptual sensitivity" in order to open the researcher's mind to the issues and categories. (Mohammadpour, 2011: 233-234).
This study has used the interpretive-structural sociological approach to express a conceptual framework. The interpretive perspective determines human as an active, productive, and significant being who is continually constructing and also originating significant social life and everyday social realities. As the interpretive approach explains, the normal and everyday interactions and individual's actions provide the sources of knowledge and consciousness, and there is no significant thing outside the interaction of people. Consequently, public knowledge is the main source of knowledge and science, and the scientific method should rely on these sources (Giddens, 1984 quoted by Mohammadpour, 2011). Accordingly, in this research, it has been tried to use mainly interpretive approaches, everyday sociology to understand the lived experience of headed household women in the context of cultural - social construction, the concept of empowerment (Kabir, 2010) that has been raised in feminist discussions about power and gender (from the 1980s and 1990s), Sara Lange's empowerment theory as the motivation of the research process and theoretical sensitivity helps to study and represent their understanding and interpretation of the earthquake phenomenon by entering the semantic system and people's mentality in the study.

This study also has used the concepts of feminist approaches; according to feminist theories, the inferior position of women in society continues through gender ideologies, and this is continually produced and reproduced (Militzer (2008), which is supported by people around them, which is rooted in the women's "weakness and inability" and it prevents access to precious and empowering support resources that will eventually result in the women's vulnerability, particularly headed household women. This study has also used the concepts related to "Lee" empowerment theory, which stresses women empowerment, particularly oppressed, deprived, and vulnerable women through education and awareness to empower them in life situations (Payne, 2012): 557.

Research Methodology
Methodology refers to the thinking method about reality, and social phenomenon and the method also refers to a set of procedures and techniques to collect and analyze data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 3, quoted by Mohammadpour, 2010). This is a qualitative study that has been conducted using the Grounded Theory Method (GT), in which concepts are interpreted based on the socio-cultural context and the situation that they have occurred. The data was collected using the field method in this study, and open interviews with semi-structured questions have been used as tools and techniques to collect data. The study unit is the "concepts" obtained and extracted from the interview process with participants. According to the methodology, the research is a kind of qualitative, human-centered, and a source of information (Mohammadpour, 2010: 82). Participants in the research or the research's target population, in terms of the people we intend to interview or observe (Flick, 2014: 125), are "women and girls heads of households." Since the number of people who were interviewed cannot be predicted certainly at first (Erlandson, 1993), "Purposeful" sampling has been used to select individuals and "theoretical" sampling to identify the number of people, discover the research path, determine the adequacy of data, enrich the dimensions and characteristics of categories to the limit of theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 2015). In this study, 15 "headed household women and girls" were interviewed from the earthquake-hit cities of Sarpol-e-Zahab, Gilan-e-Gharb, Paveh, Thalas-e-Babajani, and Qasr-e-Shirin and Islamabad-e-Gharb. They had a live and direct experience of the earthquake that theoretical saturation was achieved with this number. There were no new significant data to develop and evolve the theory in the study (Hooman, 2006: 92). The interview was performed using the participant's opinions, considering the ethical considerations and all standard conditions, such as determining the place, time, and limit of the interview, according to the interviewees' special conditions and keeping confidentiality. After asking the first main question openly, semi-structured questions were used. All conversations were recorded after obtaining the participants' permission without a name if necessary, in agreement with the main question of the research during the conversations to better understand the answers and acquire more information. The approximate mean of the interviews was 49 minutes.

Data were analyzed using contextual theory in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. The underlying method is based on data collection and analysis simultaneously. In this way, the audio file is listened to and analyzed and written line by line and sentence by sentence on paper immediately after the first interview, and the closest concept that covers the lines or sentences fully was replaced as the
first stage coding, and in the same way, axial coding and finally selective coding was performed. Two criteria of "validity and reliability" have been used to measure the validity and reliability of this research (Rezapour Nasrabadi, 2017). The technique of triangulation has been used to defeat the inherent bias and enhance the scientific accuracy of the research results.

**Findings**

2604 concepts were obtained based on the findings achieved by this study, analyzing the interviews completed by the participants in the initial open coding phase, which express the general views of the participants concerning the earthquake phenomenon, and 363 concepts were extracted as secondary open coding after sorting and comparing overlapping and similar open codes. 99 categories and final 20 major categories were extracted from their categorization and re-abstraction, regarding the dimensions of "conditions", "process/interaction" and "consequences" in the axial coding stage. Ultimately, all final major categories were integrated and the central category entitled "Intensifying the disabling social foundations" was selected, which covers most of the extracted concepts and is the main theme of the research question, which is shown in the following paradigmatic model:

![Figure](image)

The phenomenon "Capability Poverty- The treat to the opportunities" Disabled Women

Analyzing data shows that the conditions and factors ruling the field of study, including poor crisis management, value systems, and repressive ideologies, poverty, illiteracy, and other factors, all have
sub-categories can cause social phenomena, "Capability Poverty - Threat to Opportunity" (disabled women) that has meant the inability to develop capacities and lack of access to important and precious resources for participants in the earthquake. In such a way, they have been unable to access the needed minimum resources and facilities for themselves and their children during the earthquake. This was specified by analyzing the participants' narratives. Social processes and the unequal structure of gender power prevailing in the field of study affect this phenomenon. According to Bourdieu, participating women, according to their narrations, have accepted and internalized these conditions as accepted unknown, unquestioned, and defenseless beliefs. They cannot receive help due to cultural pressures and fear of prejudice and labeling by the people, and crisis management has not had any program in agreement with their needs. Where women participants know themselves as "lonely weaknesses", this internalized habitus completely confirmed their status. Yes, these women are "capable" and weak in their own perceptions, but this inability is not due to their personal and inherent weakness and inadequacy, but to their inferiority and low status and caused by patriarchal relations and structural inequalities that have been imposed on them and disabled them.

Women participating in research in this social context have been restrained and deprived of access to the "resources" and "agency" of two elements that Amartya Sen named them "capability" collectively. They are deprived of "being and acting". Nutrition, health, shelter, and satisfactory housing, clothing, food, and clean water are fundamental needs during an earthquake, and if there is a systematic gender difference in access to these needs, it will show inequality in abilities and facilities. Participants have received the least social support because the findings reveal that expectations and abuse supported them or that their relatives' support network has been very deprived and weak and unable to help and support them. They continually addressed the indifference and lack of planning and management by the authorities to address their situation, injustice, and discrimination in providing services and gender outlook, pity, and humiliation towards them. Their capabilities have not been observed. However, they have made many efforts to save themselves and their children. Still, it has remained unprofitable due to the traditional closed space and lack of effective support and other factors. Research has shown that a crisis management system without participation and "gender" consideration can only intensify the effects of disasters, especially on women and girls.

Participating women used strategies and mechanisms to cope with this phenomenon. These strategies include resilience and active action, and deconstruction to the conditions of the field of study to meet the needs and access to opportunities in any way possible to compromise and passivity and submission to the crisis conditions. But because cultural systems at the local (micro) level, where gender norms, beliefs, traditions, and stereotypes are constructed and justified by gender officials (including kinship, religion, etc.), impose more sovereignty and pressure on the participating women, any effort to cope with the traditional, patriarchal system and then attempt to prove the women has widely failed. According to the participated women, they wished for death in the earthquake due to their cultural context, a difficult and bitter situation.

The consequence of this situation for women participants was helplessness and indifference- the challenge of "power" - threats and insecurity - feelings of abandonment - physical and psychological harm - pessimism and children's challenge. The mentioned consequences from the perspective and mental interpretation provided by the participating women are caused by intensifying the disabling social foundations in the earthquake, which has made the living conditions more difficult and complicated for them than before due to the underlying field factors.

**Intensifier of disabled social foundations Selective coding**

The main concept of this study was chosen on a more abstract level than the head household women's perception, intensifying the disabling social foundations that include the phenomenon of capability poverty and all causal, process, and consequential dimensions and connect them in a process continuum and helps to create a theoretical structure of the problem. Headed household women know earthquakes as intensifying social structures and gnoseological and value foundations that have made them incapable of earthquakes and have had irreversible consequences. A structure that they cannot encounter and change. Radical, liberal feminism theories confirm this central concept: how gender differences are
changed into gender differences by cultural hypotheses, and how these differences next influence social relations; and how social structures produce a sense of obedience and weakness in women. The traditional patriarchal culture that governs the field of study defines the headed household women's interactions and actions in a specific range that if they do not remain obedient, will result in stigma and this fear will inhibit headed household women of any self-confidence, self-esteem, and decision making in sensitive situations. The women's vulnerability to natural disasters is rooted mainly in these same disabling structures that not only do not support women's empowerment (or bias support) but also apply different interpretations of culture and religion, including oral and written narratives and value systems to justify the disabling forces and deprive and limit them more, and affects the headed household women's mental beliefs and personality structure in admitting the current situation highly. These disabling social foundations have been perceived not only in the women's living environment but also in providing the participants' services and crisis management. According to an interpretive-constructivist perspective, even disaster planning and management, its effects and responses are inherently social processes. Consequently, the whole world occurs and continues in a discriminatory and prejudicial atmosphere against women. Social experience indicates disasters, relationships, practices, and "gendered social institutions," and disasters are revealed in these completely gendered social systems that cause women's disability in natural disasters such as earthquakes.

**Conclusion**

This study results in the main finding: the phenomenon of capacity poverty-threat of opportunities (disabled women) and on a more abstract and macro-level intensifies the social foundations of the disabled social foundations, which was constructed by analyzing the interview data and covers most of the extracted research categories. Mental interpretation of the headed household women's experience in the earthquake phenomenon confirms the claim that headed household women in environmental disasters (earthquakes), on the one hand, have been in a humble, unequal and discriminatory social situation and on the other hand, chronic poverty and deprivation in the region. This category is influence by conditions such as value systems and repressive ideologies ruling women, underdevelopment, and deprivation of the region, weakness in crisis management, lack of awareness, and knowledge of disasters. Conditions with deep roots in internalized gender beliefs and stereotypes in the field of study, such that has created a lack of power and empowerment in women through the structure of gender power that defines and constructs gender behaviors.

Women have fully understood men's cultural ruling context and the women's obedience, discrimination, judgment, prejudice, and cultural labels at all levels and dimensions, even in crisis management in this context, conditions that exclude "agency" and "access to resources" from participation and have caused them capability poverty and lack of "power of life choices"; conditions that have made their living conditions much more difficult and complicated compared to before due to the lack of social support. Repressive ideological obstacles, provincial poverty and deprivation, and crisis management have produced a triangle that has made further difficult the field for headed household women and created many participating women problems.

These conditions caused a phenomenon called "capacity poverty - the threat of opportunities," a phenomenon that indicates women's poverty and powerlessness in accessing valuable resources and equal opportunities in society; a phenomenon affected by the structure of gender inequality strengthened and reproduced using social processes. Participating women revealed reactions such as social resilience and active action, compromise, and passive action in interacting with this phenomenon, but since cultural structures, beliefs, traditions, and gender stereotypes are more powerful, accordingly, had consequences such as helplessness and indifference, the challenge of "power", threats and insecurity, physical and psychological damages, feelings of abandonment, and the challenge of children. This study's findings were confirmed by some of the concepts of feminist theories and Sarah Lange's theory of empowerment, choice theory, Lee theory, and capacity theory.

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disabled social foundations, which was constructed by analyzing the interview data. Mental interpretation of the headed household women’s experience in the earthquake phenomenon confirms the claim that headed household women in environmental disasters (earthquakes) on the one hand, have been in a humble, unequal, and discriminatory social situation and on the other hand, in chronic poverty and deprivation in the region. Conditions that are produced and influenced by social foundations during the time are accepted and internalized as a cultural system so that it denies the participants of any representation and agency in different situations. Conditions that have provided the least social support and management with a gender approach to realize their needs and participation have caused irreversible consequences for them. The participating women felt that they have no required ability to develop their abilities and manage their own lives and their children in the mentioned contextual conditions and the resulting social inequalities in most public and even private fields of life. They are deprived of many individual and social opportunities and are pressured by the organized structures of traditions, which were intensified by the earthquake.

Some women participating in the research, although actively deconstructed and concentrated their efforts to improve their lives and situations in this phenomenon, but the unequal structure and imposition of inferiority with prejudice and discrimination along with poor crisis management made them despair, disappointed, and helpless to continue to try to rebuild a life. Additionally, the internalized beliefs of “being a woman and being weak” by some participants, social fears of stigma, labeling, and harm, have denied them the possibility of any agency and change so that they were not enabled to create the slightest change in the current conditions and passively surrendered to the situation and were totally deprived of the available facilities and opportunities. This phenomenon directs us to the fact that access to equal opportunities in society in crises, in addition to the need for awareness and knowledge and obtain the agency or “internal power,” but also requires seriously social support and change in the "social disabling basic structures " which are the same internalized norms and rules of stereotyping; in such a way that these opportunities are developed and accessible through social and legal support resources in agreement to the vulnerable group of headed household women, and on the other hand, fundamental and social barriers are not strong enough to restrict access to valuable capabilities or opportunities.

In the following parts, the conceptual model of empowering the headed household women in crisis is presented in the form of a diagram and explains that this model can only be cited in the Kermanshah earthquake and in the case of headed household women in the studied area and cannot be attributed to the general headed household women:

"Agency" is considered as one of the dimensions of power at the heart of the empowerment process in this diagram, at a "more abstract" level, obtained from the main categories of research, but agency alone cannot lead to empowerment and choice in headed household women. Access to equitable resources and opportunities in society, and the need to acquire agency or "internal power" to change the current condition, also requires modifying the "fundamental disabling social structures", which are the same institutionalized norms and rules; in such a way that social support networks and resources at the intermediate level, where gender norms and rules are constructed and defined, on the one hand, and legal laws at the macro policy level, provide equitable access to social opportunities for headed household women, and on the other hand, social barriers and repressive ideologies are not powerful enough to prevent access to precious resources or opportunities and make women more informed and knowledge as a key element of empowerment through education.

The empowerment process will be more difficult when women, reflect forms of inequality in the form of beliefs and behaviors due to a lack of "inner power" and a lack of positive perception and self-awareness of their abilities that indicate they have accepted a social situation in their conscience with less value and subjugation "in society; Women observe social norms and practices that show the mental approval of their "inferior position" and the approval of the "superior position" of the opposite sex in society, which will stop occurring the "capabilities" and the right to equal opportunities. It can be stated that these behaviors also are originated from a kind of choice, but choices that originate from the women's inferior position and strengthen it and reproduce the unequal gender structure. Power relationships are revealed through agency and choice and through the "type" of individual's choices;
Bourdieu believes that as long as the mental evaluations of social actors are considerably consistent with the objectively organized possibilities, the world of Doxa rests intact. The transition from Doxa to speech, a more critical “consciousness,” only happens at times that the “conventionalized” statements of culture miss their “naturalized and institutionalized” quality and the “optionality” becomes the basis of the existing social system.

Eventually, empowering the headed household women with access to and control over resources and social participation will change the micro-level and the macrostructure to achieve power and “gender justice”. This process can certainly modify the cultural system and institutionalized beliefs about women’s empowerment and the implementation of policies and legal laws in the macro-structure of society, which eventually improves their well-being as vulnerable social groups in crisis other situations. In such a way that not only to be able to achieve valuable privileges but also their ability to choose to be respected and accepted by society and to be improved and developed. Otherwise, we will still observe the reproduction of “disabling social foundations and intensifying gender inequality”, which will cause more inability and vulnerability in headed household women.
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