The Paradox of Women's High Educational Attainment and Low Representation in Managerial Positions in Iran: Examining Economic Gender Inequality

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ABSTRACT

On the one hand, women across the globe play a vital role in society and the economy, contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals. On the other hand, in many countries, higher levels of education among women have been linked to increased participation in the labor force and managerial positions. However, in Iran, a gender gap persists in women's access to career advancement and managerial roles, despite their growing access to higher education. This creates a paradox: while women's educational attainment has risen, their representation remains relatively low. This contradiction underscores the relevance of the key terms in this article's title—gender inequality and paradox. Using the logit method, micro labor force data from Iran, this article examines the gender gap and factors influencing women's employment in managerial positions. By using household budget data, the model analysis indicates that in Iran, only 16.6% of managers are women (83.4% men), placing the country among the bottom four in terms of the gender gap index. The findings reveal that higher education levels, the number of literates, and the number of employed members in a household positively influence women's willingness to pursue managerial positions. Conversely, factors such as being the head of the household, being married, household size, miscellaneous income sources, and gender discrimination negatively impact women's willingness to accept managerial roles in Iran. A key policy implication of this study is the importance of selecting managers—regardless of gender—based on qualifications, which contribute to reducing gender inequality in managerial positions.

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1. Introduction

$\mathcal{W}$omen have played an indisputable role in numerous economic events, and their contribution to sustainable development plans has received increasing attention worldwide. It is widely acknowledged that women are integral to any economy; without their involvement, economic progress would be unattainable. One of the most significant markers of equality and human rights in a society is the advancement of women's status, particularly in management and decision-making roles. In Iran, it was anticipated that the growing number of highly educated women would lead to greater participation in economic decision-making. However, this expectation remains paradoxical. Unfortunately, traditional cultural norms in the country still perpetuate the belief that men are better suited for managerial roles than women. While women have gained greater access to higher education in Iran, their opportunities to ascend to managerial positions in society remain limited. Research has shown that women have successfully managed various sectors of the economy and society, proving that gender does not influence management effectiveness (Peterson, 2019; Ardoin et al., 2019; Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Maheshwari et al., 2021; Farhan, 2022). Some studies attribute the low rates of women's economic participation in Iran and other Muslim-majority countries to the influence of Islamic cultural norms. Other research highlights the role of oil revenues in sustaining conservative attitudes and restricting women's employment opportunities. Reliance on oil income has fostered a particular lifestyle in which men are expected to be the primary breadwinners, while women are relegated to domestic roles (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Assad et al., 2014, 2016; Meza-Mejia et al., 2023). The development of this study is crucial for several reasons. First, it addresses gender inequality, which is one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving gender equality and empowering women are central objectives of these goals. Second, gender inequality, particularly the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles, is a global issue and a significant challenge in Iranian governance. Third,

compared to other areas of research on women, there has been relatively little focus on examining women's roles in management and leadership. Fourth, this study highlights the importance of the gender gap in Iran, a country whose economy is heavily reliant on oil revenues and whose culture is deeply influenced by religion. Fifth, while previous research on women's roles in the economy has often relied on bibliometrics, surveys, and questionnaires (Beloskar et al., 2024), this study adopts econometric and microdata methodologies as a complementary approach to explore the topic. Finally, the government has faced increasing challenges related to women's issues and their participation in Iranian decision-making processes during the period of 2022–2025. Following the introduction, the second section of the article reviews the literature, theoretical foundations, and relevant empirical studies. The third section focuses on women's participation in Iran and examines gender indicators. The fourth section analyzes the trends of the variables and introduces the model. The fifth section discusses the model's fitness and adaptability, along with an analysis of the coefficients derived from the model's estimation. Finally, the conclusion is presented in the sixth section.

2. Literature and Empirical studies

Women face disadvantages in many nations in at least one aspect of their lives, including gender inequality in education, discrimination at home and in the workplace, and other similar situations. Shockingly, around 30 countries lack legislation addressing violence against women, and in 35% of countries, women are prohibited from working in certain occupations. This harsh reality of gender disparity continues to worsen women's socioeconomic standing, despite the strong theoretical foundations supporting gender equality. Theories attempt to explain how gender differences impact societal welfare, economic growth, and development. Both theoretical and empirical evidence indicate a positive and significant relationship between reducing gender inequality and fostering economic progress. Firstly, gender equality promotes economic growth and development by enabling the efficient allocation of highly

educated female labor, which in turn boosts economic progress. Secondly, macroeconomic theories on gender disparity highlight how such inequality can hinder economic growth or, conversely, how economic development can reduce gender gaps. Thirdly, gender disparity also raises important issues related to discrimination and cultural preferences. Theories differentiate between disparities caused by outright discrimination and those stemming from cultural preferences for specific gender roles. Addressing gender imbalances caused by discrimination tends to improve welfare and efficiency more significantly than adjustments based solely on social preferences. Fourthly, economies with reduced gender inequality tend to experience higher per capita incomes. Theories of gender equality often emphasize the interplay between politics, economics, and culture in shaping gender trends. This underscores the multilateral relationship between social and economic factors in addressing the gender gap. Development and economic expansion are therefore essential for women's empowerment. Improvements in healthcare, living standards, and access to education have all contributed to greater participation of women in public life and decision-making processes. While historical legacies may still influence current gender dynamics, cultural shifts and socioeconomic advancements play a larger role in shaping gender equality. Depending on their nature, traditions and customs within a society can either promote or hinder the progress of gender equality. Fifthly, there is evidence that institutional factors also play a significant role in perpetuating gender disparity. The structure of laws, regulations, and governance systems can have a profound impact on gender equality. Institutional frameworks that uphold equity and inclusivity by guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women can empower them and contribute to reducing gender disparities. Enhancing the institutional environment not only promotes gender equality but also improves productivity and fosters economic growth. Better institutions contribute to solving problems more efficiently (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994; North, 2003; Acemoglu, 2009; Bertay et al., 2020; Potratz, 2022; Zhang & Basha, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

The theoretical foundations of gender equality highlight the existence of multiple approaches to understanding women's position in society. Broadly, these approaches can be classified into four categories: 1-Classical Approaches which focus primarily on economic development as a key factor influencing gender equality.2-Human Development Approaches that emphasize recent cultural and emancipatory changes that foster the development of gender-egalitarian attitudes and self-expression values 3-Historical Heritage Approaches which are shaped by existing cultural and political traditions, which influence gender dynamics over time.4-Institutional approaches that examine gender equality through the lens of political engineering, focusing on how institutional frameworks and governance structures impact gender equality (Alexander & Welzel, 2007). According to some theories, gender is a social construct. Feminist theorists distinguish between gender, which encompasses the social constructions of masculinity and femininity, and sex, which refers to biological distinctions. Proponents of liberal feminism argue that women are equally capable of moral reasoning and moral agency as men. On the other hand, radical feminists go beyond merely acknowledging gender inequality, asserting that men deliberately oppress and subjugate women, with a strong emphasis on power relations (Caitlin, 2023; Widamayer, 2024). Despite progress, women's participation in high-level jobs remains restricted in many cases due to the persistent gender gap (Valk et al., 2014; Livingstone et al., 2016). This phenomenon is often described as the "glass ceiling," a metaphor that captures the invisible barriers preventing women from advancing to top positions. As such, the glass ceiling metaphor serves as a relevant framework for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of this essay. Given its relevance to women's managerial challenges, which are the focus of this article, it is worthwhile to delve deeper into the concept of the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling metaphor refers to the various barriers that prevent women from advancing to higher positions in management. While initially associated with women, the term has since been broadened to include

discrimination against all minorities. The metaphor was first introduced in 1978 by Marilyn Loden (1946–2022) to describe the obstacles faced by high-achieving women in their careers. The glass ceiling is most prevalent in institutions and organizations dominated by men, such as the banking and finance industries, engineering, and other traditionally male-dominated fields (Knights & Tullberg, 2013; Poma & Pistoresi, 2024).Under the glass ceiling framework, men are often expected to exhibit qualities such as determination, ambition, and competitiveness, while women are stereotypically associated with traits like compassion and kindness. Many organizations still hold the perception that a woman's primary responsibility is to care for the home, leading to assumptions that women are less dedicated to their work and, therefore, less deserving of promotions (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Rita Hull, 1997; Weyer, 2007; Khodijah et al., 2024). As a result, even when women possess the same level of education, ambition, and commitment to their careers as men, they face greater challenges in advancing to higher positions. Despite their resilience and determination, women often lack the platform necessary for career advancement due to widespread gender discrimination, with the glass ceiling serving as a particularly significant barrier. In essence, the glass ceiling represents an artificial barrier rooted in personal or organizational biases that prevent qualified women from reaching management positions (Burton & Parker, 2010; Vidhy & Mageswari, 2024). A typical example of such artificial obstacles is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Fictitious obstacles for women to reach high jobs

SOCIO CULTURAL ASPECTS

• Gender Stereotypes
• Cultural Expectations
• Balance Between Work and Life Challenges
• Implicit Bias

ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS

• Male-Dominated Leadership
• Absence of Diversity Initiatives
• Restricted Mentorship and Sponsorship Opportunities
• Inflexible Workplace regulations

INDIVIDUAL ASPECTS

• Confidence and Self-Advocacy
• Negotiation Skills
• Networking Challenges
• Professional Interruptions

Source: Vidhya and Mageswari, (2024).

Despite fair laws and policies at both national and organizational levels, women still face invisible obstacles to career advancement, as highlighted by the glass ceiling metaphor. The factors contributing to the glass ceiling range from cognitive characteristics of women themselves to external content components, such as social norms and organizational structures. Critiquing the glass ceiling, it is evident that gender equality is one of the main keys to fostering democracy for women. However, the glass ceiling remains dominant, largely due to constraining societal and cultural norms (Oxley, 2013; Casini, 2016; Aksoy et al., 2019; Dzuhayatin, 2020; Bloch et al., 2021). One fundamental explanation for the gender gap and the persistence of the glass ceiling lies in male supervisors' stereotyped perceptions of women. Another contributing factor is competitiveness, where there is often no platform or opportunity for women to work alongside male managers. A

third factor is the subjective nature of selection processes, which are frequently biased. Candidates are often evaluated based on personal judgments rather than their qualifications for the role, leading male managers to choose other men similar to themselves. Additionally, the lack of access to training programs and the absence of suitable work experience for female managers further reinforce the glass ceiling (Kleiman, 2003; Noe et al., 2007; Opatha, 2020).Gender equality, as seen through frameworks like the glass ceiling and historical perspectives such as John Stuart Mill's concerns in the 19th century, has a long and complex history marked by significant milestones and ongoing challenges. John Stuart Mill (1988/1869), in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), was one of the early advocates for female equality. Later, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, recognized gender equality as a fundamental human right, laying the groundwork for international law. Similarly, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The UN General Assembly in 1975 also brought global attention to women's issues. More recently, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emphasized empowering women and achieving gender equality, underscoring the connection between gender equality and sustainable development. Despite these advancements, manifestations of gender inequality persist, including violence against women, underrepresentation in politics, and economic disparities. Reducing gender inequality and redirecting female labor into more productive roles could not only foster economic growth but also improve social justice, strengthen human rights, and enhance the rule of law. Female leaders are as essential as their male counterparts, and their aspirations for leadership are sharpened when they receive support, encouragement, and recognition for their abilities as part of a team (Terborg et al., 1977; Hearn & Husu, 2016; Meromo-Cerdan & Lopez-Nicolas, 2017; Bazel-Shoham et al., 2020; ,Dadgar et al 2021,Willson-Raybould, 2022; Foo, 2023; EU, 2024).While this work takes

a broad view of the critical issue of the gender gap, it places a particular focus on the Iranian gender context.

Several studies on women's engagement in socio-economic and managerial spheres have been conducted in recent decades, particularly following the reform period in Iran (1997–2004). This section highlights some of these investigations. Pishgahifard and Asadirad (2003) analyzed the relationship between women's education in Iran and their presence in legislative forums. They concluded that, although women's enrollment in higher education has increased, their employment and participation in legislative processes remain relatively low. Similarly, Nowrozi (2004) identified numerous restrictions and barriers limiting women's opportunities in Iran's labor market. Additionally, the study found that women's earnings are significantly lower than men's, even at the same educational level. Hajizadeh (2005) compared the rates at which men and women are promoted to university scholar positions. The findings revealed that, despite women being highly motivated, there was little evidence to support their advancement to these roles. Razaghi Nasrabad and Kargar Shorki (2008) concluded that managerial-level participation in Iran heavily favors men. Razavi (2009) emphasized the role of societal customs in contributing to the low participation rate of women in senior management positions. Similarly, Shahtalabi et al. (2009) found that social and organizational barriers, women's personality traits, and societal attitudes toward women's roles in management have significantly influenced the limited involvement of women in managerial positions in Iran. Magidu (2010), in a study using data from 2008 and 2009 for Uganda, concluded that single women exhibit a greater desire to participate in the labor market compared to married women and that women are more likely to participate in urban areas than in rural ones. Similarly, the study by Sarani et al. (2014) demonstrated that women's education has a positive effect on their participation in the labor market. Using household budget data from 2001 to 2007, Moshiri et al. (2015) found that increasing access to university education significantly boosts women's participation in the labor market.

Hendy (2015), using data from the Egyptian labor market, concluded that the participation of educated women in Egypt has declined over time. In a study of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, Assaad et al. (2016) found that the decrease in public sector employment opportunities for highly educated women has contributed to a decline in their overall labor market participation. Similarly, Nasir et al. (2020) demonstrated that socioeconomic factors, including marital status, head-of-household status, and average household income, significantly affect women's engagement in Pakistan's labor market. Jafari et al. (2020) highlighted that women have far fewer opportunities than men to lead sports teams. Molai et al. (2020) identified several barriers to women's participation in macro-management roles, including social-cultural barriers (gender traditions and patriarchal culture), political barriers (absence of women in political circles and parties, and inability to lobby), organizational barriers (lack of trust in women and the perception of management as a male function), and individual-family barriers (lack of confidence in women, lack of motivation, and family responsibilities).Yusnandar et al. (2020), using 2018 data from Indonesia, concluded that variables such as marital status, fertility, health, and education significantly impact the participation of men and women across different age groups. Among these, education held the greatest importance for women's participation. Klasen et al. (2021), analyzing data from eight developing and emerging economies (Bolivia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Jordan, South Africa, Tanzania, and Vietnam), examined the determinants of urban married women's labor force participation. Their findings revealed that increased education levels and decreased fertility rates lead to higher participation rates. However, in relatively poor countries, rising household income negatively impacts women's labor market participation rates. Jami Abed Moghadam et al. (2021) found that gender perspectives have consistently hindered women's participation in macro-management during the four decades following the Iranian Revolution. Similarly, Motaghi et al. (2021) concluded that the patriarchal culture dominating society, along with

women's lack of confidence in their abilities, significantly impacts their success in political management. Mojtahedzadeh et al. (2022) highlighted that organizational and cultural factors have played a greater role in sustaining women's management positions. Khanna's (2022) study in India revealed a negative correlation between women's labor force participation and higher education. Meanwhile, Mirloohi et al. (2022) emphasized that social and cultural variables have been the most influential factors affecting women's political participation in Iran.

Lari et al. (2022), using a national-level sample survey conducted in Qatar between December 2019 and January 2020, investigated the determinants of women's workforce participation. Their findings revealed that education level, marital status, and age significantly influence women's participation in Qatar's labor market. Similarly, Shahin Kutlu (2023), using 2021 microdata and variables such as age, relationship to the head of the household, marital status, education level, and household size, analyzed women's labor force participation in Turkey. The results of the logit model estimation showed that age, education level, and marital status significantly affect women's participation. Furthermore, the study suggested that women's labor force participation could be increased through education, professional training, and entrepreneurship. Azari and Chamani (2023) highlighted that the status and role of women in management have been largely overlooked in Iran's developmental plans. Shava et al. (2023) found that cultural barriers, such as patriarchy and negative attitudes toward women, have caused significant inequality in Zimbabwe. Elmi et al. (2023), examining the determinants of labor force participation in Iran with a gender-based approach using 2006 household budget data, concluded that being single positively affects the probability of participation, while being a student has a negative effect. Additionally, household size and education level positively influence participation, and being the head of the household increases the likelihood of participation. Marjanovic et al. (2024), using panel data from 2000 to 2021, investigated the determinants of women's labor force

participation in European Union countries. Their findings showed that GDP per capita, total fertility rate, equal retirement age for men and women, net annual income, women's non-high school education, and higher education enrollment all positively affect women's labor force participation. Rahayu (2024), analyzing data from 2017 to 2023, examined factors affecting women's labor force participation in Indonesia. The study found that women's access to the Internet had a negative and significant effect on the growth rate of women's labor force participation, while the average duration of girls' education and the provincial minimum wage had a significant positive effect. Hamim et al. (2025), using data from 2006 to 2022, analyzed the U-curve hypothesis regarding education levels and economic growth on women's labor force participation across 34 provinces in Indonesia. Their study confirmed the U-curve hypothesis, showing a relationship between primary and high school education levels and economic growth. The innovation of this article lies in its focus on Iran, using updated household budget data to examine the issue. Unlike many studies that rely on macro-level data, this study uses microdata to explain women's behavior. In the literature on household budget data, the logit model is considered an appropriate method for analyzing socio-economic factors. This study also employs the logit model to analyze the factors affecting women's management.

3. Iranian Women's Participation in Managerial Roles: Legal Frameworks and Gender Equality Indices

The slogans and actual performance of Iranian governance regarding the gender gap are contradictory. On one hand, noticeable efforts have been made to address gender inequality, such as the establishment of the Women's Socio-Cultural Council, the National Women's Headquarters, and the creation of the Women's Faction in Parliament. On the other hand, the actual performance of the government often undermines gender equality and worsens women's participation in economic leadership roles. Eliminating unfair discrimination, creating equal opportunities for women and men, and

ensuring the comprehensive rights of women are enshrined in the third principle of the Constitutional Law. Similarly, the 20th principle guarantees that every man and woman have the same legal protections and is entitled to equal human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The 21st principle focuses on creating favorable conditions for the development of women's personalities and the restoration of their material and spiritual rights. The approved Vision Document 2025 emphasizes reducing poverty and promoting equitable opportunities and income distribution for both men and women. Additionally, the *Manifest of Women's Rights and Responsibilities* outlines several key rights for women: Paragraph 49 highlights "the right of women to participate in policymaking, legislation, management, and monitoring macro affairs. "Paragraph 82 emphasizes women's right to participate in decision-making and active involvement in international issues. Paragraph 87 focuses on supporting women's scientific endeavors and the growth of research facilities led by women. Paragraph 109 clarifies "the right of women to participate in economic policies and the management of economic organizations. "Paragraphs 130 and 135 stress women's right and obligation to actively participate in legal and judicial positions. The *Citizen Rights Manifest* also reinforces these principles. Article 11 states that "women have the right to participate effectively in policymaking, legislation, management, monitoring, and to enjoy equal opportunities." Article 83 further asserts that women have the right to suitable job opportunities and equal rights and benefits with men for equal work. Despite these organizations, declarations, and legal frameworks aimed at reducing gender disparity in Iran, the actual outcomes remain contradictory. While the legal and policy frameworks appear progressive, their implementation often falls short, and the gender gap persists, particularly in economic leadership and managerial roles. Observing Iran's gender index provides a clear and informative perspective on this disparity.

A Quick look at Iran's Gender Gap Ranking: The extent to which a nation achieves gender parity is often a strong indicator of its level of wealth

and development (Burton and Parker, 2010; Kuhlmann et al., 2017). The yearly *Global Gender Gap Index* provides a comprehensive assessment of gender equality across four key areas: Political Empowerment, Health and Survival, Educational Attainment, and Economic Participation and Opportunity. Since its inception in 2006, this index has been the most extensive tool for evaluating gender equality globally. According to the 2024 report, notable nations have adjusted reduce their gender gaps. The overall gender gap score for the 146 nations included in the index is 68.5%, reflecting a 0.1% improvement compared to the 2023 report. The state of a nation's economy and its regulatory frameworks significantly influence gender equality outcomes. To effectively reduce the gender gap, nations must adopt a fundamental perspective that views gender equality as a driver of sustainable development and a catalyst for high-quality economic growth. The *Global Gender Gap Index 2024* highlights the following global trends: The gender gap in Health and Survival has narrowed by 96%. The gap in Educational Attainment has declined by 94.9%. The gap in Economic Participation and Opportunity has shrunk by 60.5%. The gap in Political Empowerment has decreased by 22.5%. Among the 146 economies covered in the 2024 report, Iran ranks 143rd, with an overall score of 57.9%, placing it near Sudan and Chad. Iran's performance in the four key areas is as follows: Health and Survival: Iran ranks the lowest globally, following Bangladesh and Sudan. Educational Attainment: Iran ranks 102nd, reflecting moderate progress in closing the educational achievement gap. Economic Participation and Opportunity: Iran ranks 116th, indicating significant challenges in women's economic engagement. Political Empowerment: Iran ranks 143rd, highlighting a severe disparity in women's political representation and leadership roles. These rankings underscore the persistent gender disparities in Iran, particularly in health, economic participation, and political empowerment, despite some progress in education. Addressing these gaps requires systemic changes and a commitment to gender equality as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Table 2. Global Gender Gap Index and Iran's Status 2024

Indicator	Rank	Score	Female	Male
Economic Participation and Opportunity	144	0.343	–	–
Labor-force participation rate %	146	0.201	13.58	67.54
Wage equality for similar work-(1-7 (best))	114	0.549	–	–
Estimated earned income- (int'l $ 1,000)	143	0.549	4.21	26.50
Legislators, senior officials and managers (%)	125	0.159	18.35	81.65
Professional and technical workers (%)	118	0.225	34.83	65.17
Educational Attainment	102	0.535	–	–
Literacy rate %	109	0.977	–	–
Enrolment in primary education %	93	0.913	97.74	98.22
Enrolment in secondary education %	108	0.995	86.17	87.94
Enrolment in tertiary education %	1	0.980	60.71	60.68
Health and Survival	116	1.000	–	–
Sex ratio at birth** %	1	0.964	–	–
Healthy life expectancy** years	126	1.009	–	–
Political Empowerment	143	0.031	–	–
Women in parliament %	134	0.059	5.60	94.40
Women in ministerial positions %	137	0.053	5.00	95.00
Years with female/male head of state (last 50)	80	0.000	0.00	50.00

Source: world economic forum, global gender gap index (2024).

The gender gap and a nation's economic success are strongly correlated, highlighting the importance of gender equality in fostering sustainable development. Policymakers should recognize that nations aiming to remain competitive must prioritize gender equality in the development of their human capital. Notably, as the representation of women among political leaders has increased globally, the number of women in senior management roles within the *Economic Participation and Opportunity* sub-index has also risen in many countries. In Iran, the largest gender disparity is found around **Political Empowerment**, serving as a cautionary tale for the Iranian government to reform its ecopolitical structures to advance gender equality.

Another significant contributor to Iran's wide gender gap is the low rate of women's economic participation relative to men. Addressing these disparities is essential for Iran to improve its overall gender equality ranking and unlock the potential of its female workforce. Globally, **Europe** has overtaken **North America** this year to rank first among the eight geographic regions in terms of gender equality**. Latin America and the Caribbean** follow North America and Europe, ranking third. **Eurasia and Central Asia,** along with **East Asia and the Pacific,** rank fourth and fifth, respectively**. Sub-Saharan Africa** ranks sixth, with an average score slightly below the global weighted average. The **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region has consistently had the lowest gender equality score (61.7%) between 2006 and 2024.Among these regions, Iran's score is lower than the MENA regional average, making gender inequality in the country particularly concerning (see Figure 1). This underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to address the persistent gaps in political empowerment, economic participation, and other areas critical to achieving gender parity.
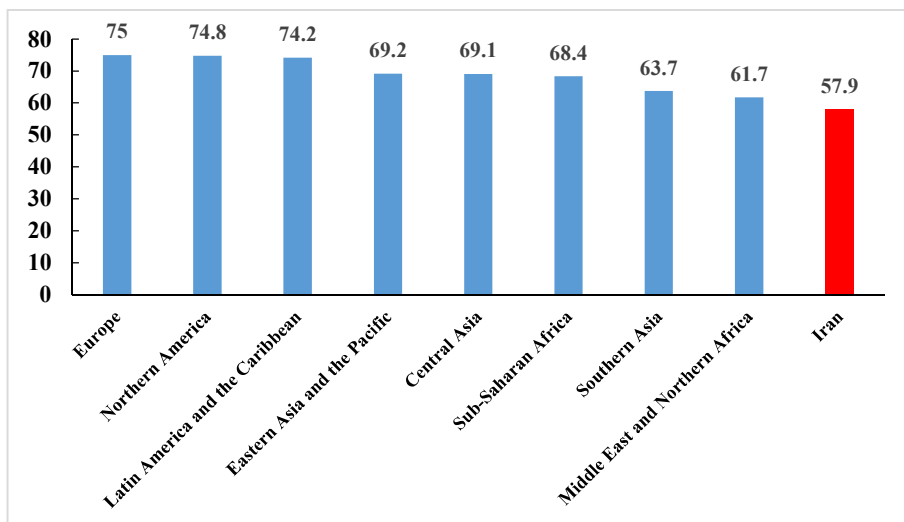

Fig 1. Gender inequality in Iran compared to other regions of the world
Source: Findings based on World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report (2024)

The annual trend of the gender gap in Iran, as illustrated in Table 3 and Fig 2, presents a highly concerning finding

Table 3. The Global Gender Gap Index in Iran-2006-2024

year	Total number of countries	Rank	Score	year	Total number of countries	Rank	Score
2006	115	108	58.02	2015	145	141	58
2007	128	118	59.03	2016	144	139	58.7
2008	130	116	60.21	2017	144	140	58.3
2009	134	128	58.39	2018	149	142	58.9
2010	135	123	59.33	2020	153	148	58.4
2011	132	125	58.94	2021	156	150	58.2
2012	135	127	50.54	2022	146	143	57.6
2013	136	130	58.42	2023	146	143	57.5
2014	142	137	58.11	2024	146	143	57.9

Source: Findings based on World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report (2024)

The average gender gap score for Iran from 2006 to 2024 is 58.51, highlighting the dire circumstances the nation faces in achieving gender equality. Notably, the situation from 2022 to 2024 has worsened compared to previous years, reflecting the impact of relatively poor governance during this period.

Fig. 2 provides a graphical representation of the trend over the years, illustrating the concerning trajectory from 2006-2024.

A significant aspect of the gender gap in Iran is that, despite some progress in reducing the gender gap in educational opportunities, women remain unable to fully utilize their abilities due to persistent disparities in economic participation, managerial opportunities, and political empowerment. Key strategies for reducing gender inequalities include increasing women's economic involvement and achieving gender parity in

political leadership and economic management. To address these challenges, new legislation must be enacted, and legal authorities must take appropriate action. In other words, Iran requires a structural shift to advance gender equality. The release of the conference's findings, coinciding with the inauguration of a new administration, could present a promising opportunity to initiate such reforms. Ignoring Iran's significant gender disparity risks leaving a growing proportion of educated women inactive, frustrated, or depressed, with some even choosing to emigrate. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles is stark, with relatively few educated women holding positions such as deputy minister, governor, or member of parliament. For instance, as shown in Table 4, the proportion of Iranian women serving as lawmakers following the revolution has, at most, reached only 5% of all legislators.
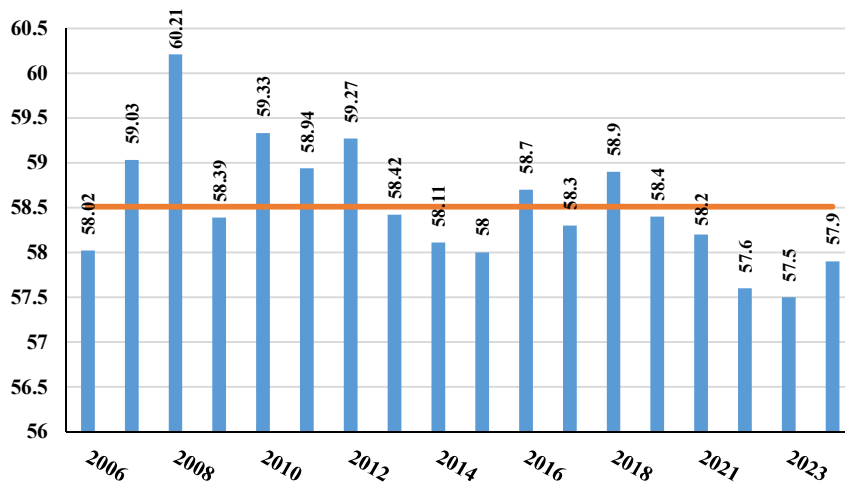

Fig. 2 The Global Gender Gap Index trend in Iran-2006-2024
Source: Findings based on World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report (2024)

Table 4. The share of Iranian women among parliamentarians after the revolution,1979-2024.

period	Start	End	women (number)	Women's share of the total (%)
1	1980- May 28	1984- May 27	4	1.2
2	1984- May 28	1988- May 27	4	1.5
3	1988- May 28	1992- May 27	4	1.4
4	1992- May 28	1996- May 27	9	3.3
5	1996- May 28	2000- May 27	14	5.1
6	2000- May 28	2004- May 27	13	4.5
7	2004- May 28	2008- May 27	13	4.5
8	2008- May 28	2012- May 27	8	2.8
9	2012- May 28	2016- May 27	9	3.1
10	2016- May 28	2020- May 27	17	5.9
11	2020- May 28	2024- May 27	16	5.5
12	2024- May 28	2028- May 27	14	4.8

Source: findings of the research

Principle 115 of the Constitution states that the president must be selected from among the political and religious elites, referred to as *'Rejal'* in Persian. However, there is disagreement between government officials and scholars regarding the interpretation of *'Rejal,'* with scholars arguing that it applies to both men and women. This disagreement highlights the ambiguity and lack of transparency in this constitutional principle. As a result of this opacity and broader gender inequality in Iran, women have never been considered as contenders for the presidency, let alone elected to the position. Similarly, in other managerial sectors, women's circumstances mirror those in the legislative and presidential subsystems, where their representation and participation remain severely limited.

4. Analyzing the trend of variables and introducing the model

As shown in Fig. 3, between 2005 and 2023, examines the hiring status of female managers in Iran. The proportion of female managers among all

employees averaged just 2.8%. Also, Figure 4, shows that the average percentage of female managers over the study period was 16.6% of all managers, meaning that 83.4% of the country's managerial positions are held by men. Despite the already small share of female managers, this trend has further declined in recent years. This is particularly striking given that women in Iran have participated in academia at rates often equal to or even exceeding those of men in certain years. This disparity highlights a paradox that this essay seeks to emphasize and explain. Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 5, women managers account for only 2.9% of all employed women. Notably, this share has declined further since 2023.
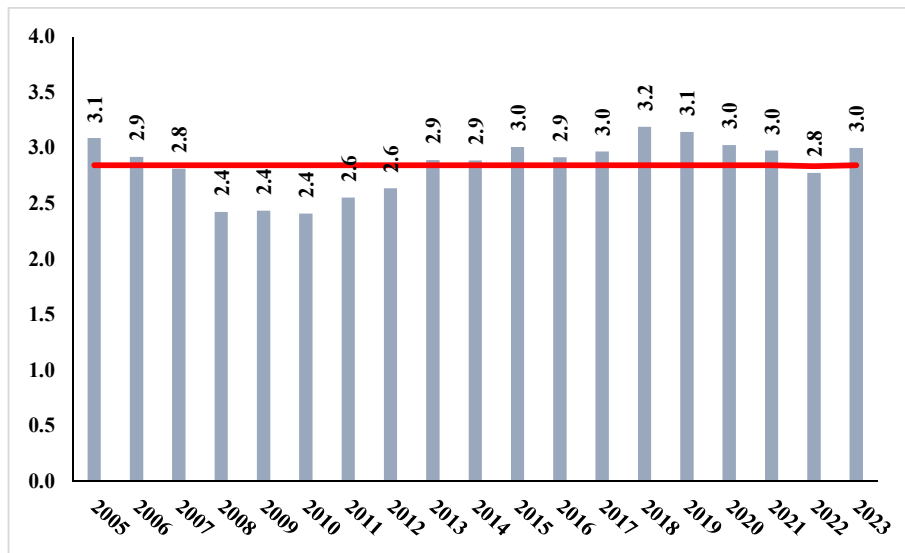

Fig 3. Managers' share of total employees (percentage)
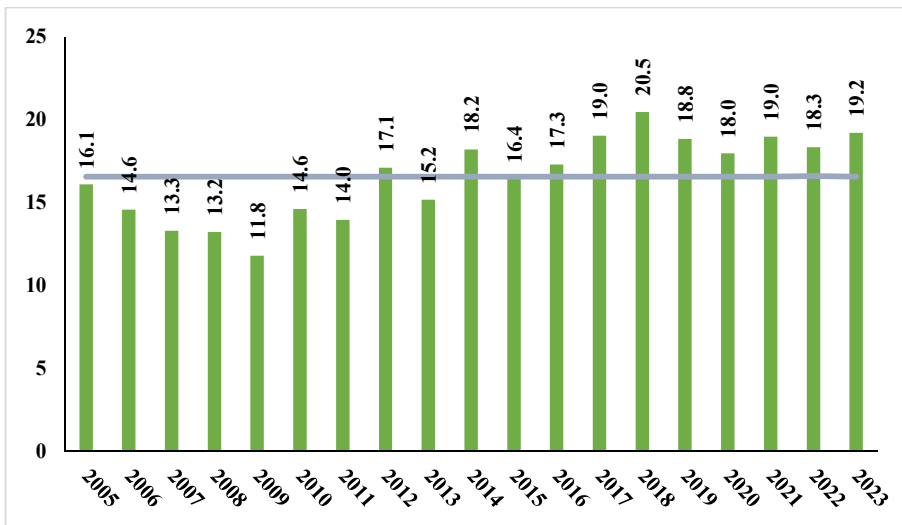**Source:** Finding of research with the help of L S PI (2024)

Fig 4. The share of female managers among all managers (percentage)
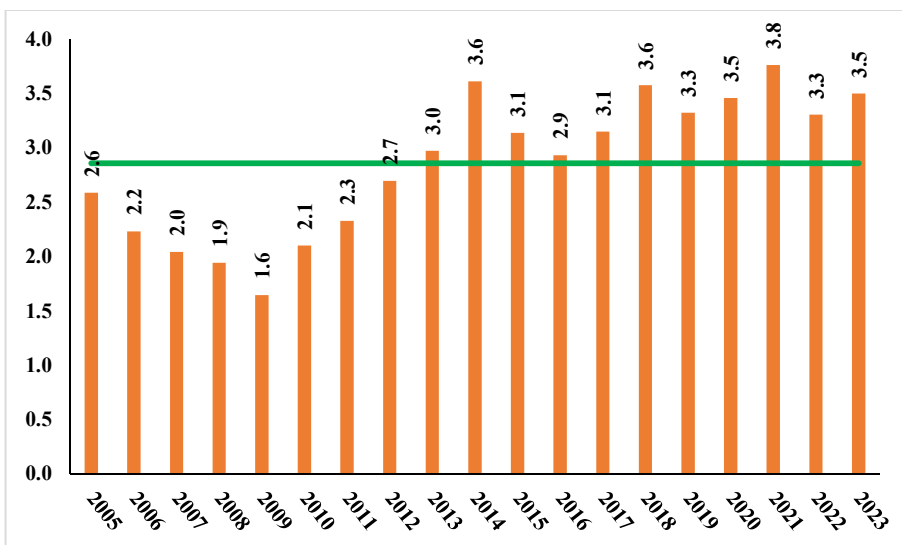**Source:** Finding of research with the help of L S PI (2024), Iran Statistics Center

Fig 5. The share of women managers among all employed women (percentage)
Source: Finding of research with the help of L S PI (2024), Iran Statistics Center

Figure 6 shows the number of female managers with higher education over the research period. The graph illustrates a decline in this proportion, with the number dropping to a minimum of 49,047 in 2009 after peaking at 78,310 in 2005. However, it later increased, reaching 131,759 in 2023 (Figure 6). Notably, 2023 marked a significant turning point in terms of the gender gap index and overall government performance. Figure 7 indicates that, among all female managers, the proportion of those with higher education degrees has increased, a trend that appears quite evident.
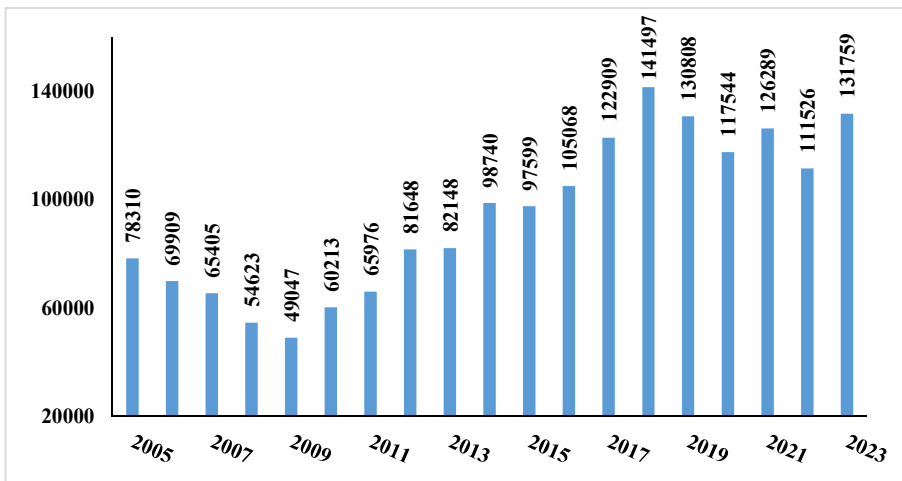

Fig 6. The number of female managers with higher education (people)
Source: Finding of research with the help of L S PI (2024)

The percentage of Iranian women working as managers with higher education has been declining, dropping from 10.2% in 2005 to just 6.7% in 2023. Moreover, 2023 not only marked the largest gender disparity but also witnessed the largest-ever demonstration against the gender gap (figure 8).
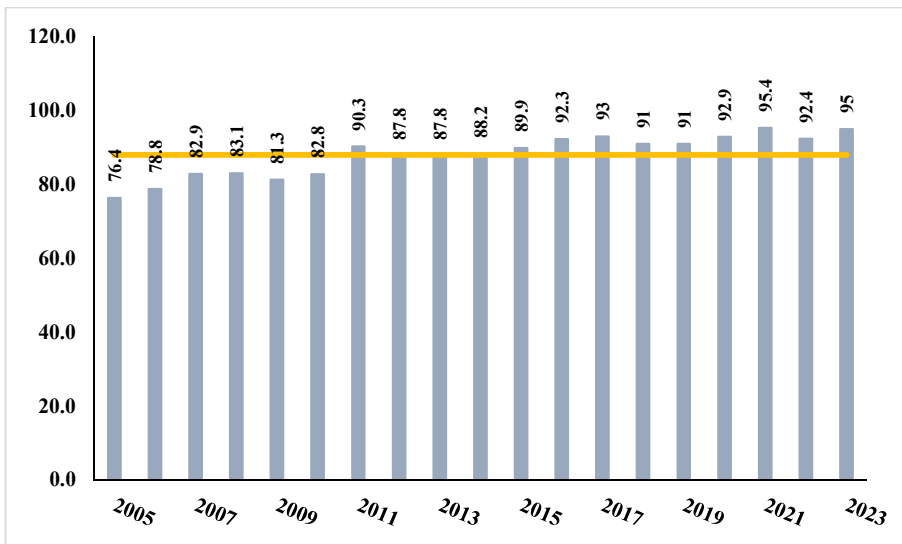
Fig 7. Share of female managers with higher education from all female managers (percentage)

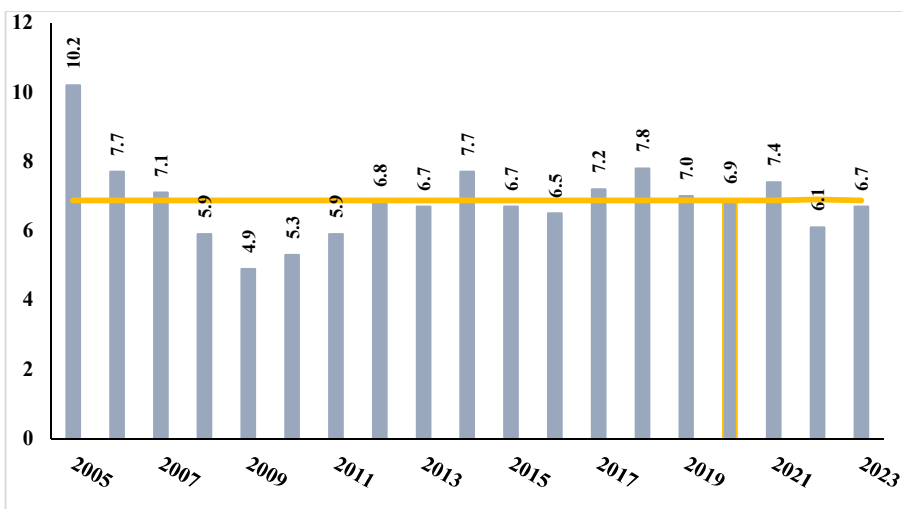**Source:** Research findings with the help of LSPI (2024) and ISC (2024)

Fig 8. The share of higher-educated female managers from all higher-educated employed women**.**

Source: findings of the research

The factors influencing the employment of women in management positions in the current research are analyzed as a function of variables outlined in the following model:

$$Managewoman = f(age, head, marry, \text{dim}, higedu, nedu, nlab, in\coth er, gen)$$

In this study, the term *Managewomen* refers to female managers. The number is assigned as one for women holding management positions and zero for those who do not. The variable *age* represents the age of individuals, while *head* denotes whether the individual is the head of the household. For heads of households, the value is one, and for others, it is zero. The variable *marry* indicates marital status, where married women are assigned a value of one and single women a value of zero, and so on. The term *dim* refers to the household size or dimension. *Hiedu* represents higher education, with a value of one for individuals with higher education and zero for others. The variable *nedu* indicates the number of literate people in each household, while *nlab* represents the number of working individuals in the household. *Incother* refers to miscellaneous income sources, such as income from renting business premises, gardens, or land, as well as income from savings, selling artifacts, and similar activities. Lastly, *gem* represents income-based gender discrimination. If a woman's gross continuous and non-continuous income from the previous year is less than the average gross income (continuous and non-continuous) of men during the same period, the value is one; otherwise, it is zero .In the models presented in this article, the factors influencing the employment of women in management positions are as follows:

Age: The likelihood of women holding managerial positions has a direct relationship with age and an inverse relationship with its square. In other words, as women age, the probability of attaining a managerial position increase, but only up to a certain threshold. Beyond this point, the likelihood decreases. Since there are no official statistics on work experience in Iran, age is used as a proxy for work experience. Typically, with increasing age

and experience, the probability of holding a managerial position rises. However, this trend does not continue indefinitely, as the probability declines after a certain age. Therefore, this variable is included in the model as a quadratic function. As expected, age (or work experience) exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with the likelihood of women attaining managerial positions.

Being the Head of the Household: Women who are heads of households often face the dual burden of playing the role of a mother while also providing for the family's expenses. This dual responsibility can lead to mental and social challenges, making female heads of households less inclined to take on additional challenges, such as managerial roles in society. As a result, this variable has a negative effect on women's willingness to accept management positions.

Marriage: In Iranian tradition, single women are more likely to be appointed to managerial positions compared to married women. This is because single women typically face fewer family-related conflicts. For married women, responsibilities such as housework and childcare act as significant obstacles, reducing their likelihood of being appointed to managerial roles. These challenges are not present for single women, making them more willing and able to accept management positions. Consequently, marriage has a negative impact on women's likelihood of attaining managerial roles.

Household Dimension: The size of the household is another factor influencing women's likelihood of being appointed to managerial positions. As the size of the household increases, the probability of women attaining management roles decreases.

Higher Education: Women with higher education are more likely to be appointed to managerial positions compared to those without. There is a direct relationship between higher education and women's access to management roles. Women with higher education qualifications are more competitive and increase their chances of being selected for management

positions, even compared to men with less education. Furthermore, higher education contributes to an overall increase in the employment of women in managerial roles. This trend highlights the importance of providing equal educational opportunities for women, as it not only enhances their chances of attaining leadership positions but also contributes to greater social welfare. Policymakers should consider this as a key factor in promoting gender equality in the workplace.

Number of Literate People in the Household: The number of literate individuals in a family is an important variable influencing women's decision to accept managerial positions. Families with more literate members tend to encourage women to pursue management roles, increasing their willingness to accept such positions.

Number of Working People in the Household: Similarly, the number of employed individuals in a household positively impacts women's decisions to accept managerial roles. The more working members there are in a household, the more likely women are to take on management positions.

Miscellaneous Incomes: Miscellaneous incomes, which include earnings from renting property, savings, selling artifacts, and other temporary sources, serve as an indicator of household wealth. While an increase in miscellaneous income raises the household budget and enhances welfare activities, it does not positively influence women's decisions to pursue managerial roles. Since such income is considered temporary, it does not provide the stability required for women to take on management responsibilities. Therefore, this variable has a negative relationship with women's likelihood of being appointed to managerial positions.

Gender Discrimination: Gender discrimination, measured as the gap between women's gross income and the average gross income of men, is a significant factor affecting women's access to management positions in Iran. This variable is expected to have a negative and inverse effect on women's likelihood of attaining managerial roles. The data used in this study comes from the 2023 Household Income and Expenditure Survey conducted by the

Iranian Statistics Center. In the workforce statistics plan, management-related roles include Senior Executive Directors, Senior Officials and Legislators, Managers of Administrative, Financial, and Legal Affairs, Production Managers, Specialized Services Managers, Hospitality Managers, Retail Managers, and similar positions.

5. Analyzing the results

According to the purpose of this research, this section investigates the factors affecting the employment of women in managerial positions in 2023. Table (5) presents the results of estimating five models using the logit method. Based on these results, the following key findings can be highlighted:**1-Age:** Employment in managerial positions increases with age. However, the square of age shows that this trend reverses after a certain age threshold, indicating a decline in the likelihood of women attaining managerial positions as they grow older. 2-**Head of Household**: Women who are heads of households are less likely to be employed in managerial positions. 3-**Marital Status**: Having a spouse has a positive and significant effect on the employment of women in managerial positions. 4-**Higher Education**: Women with higher education are more likely to be employed in managerial positions, highlighting the positive impact of education on career advancement. 5-**Household Size**: An increase in the number of family members has a negative and significant effect on the employment of women in managerial positions. 6-**Number of Literate Family Members**: An increase in the number of literate individuals in the family has a positive but insignificant effect on the employment of women in managerial positions.7-**Miscellaneous Income**: Having non-work-related income (miscellaneous income) decreases the likelihood of women being employed in managerial positions. 8-**Gender Discrimination in Income**: Income-based gender discrimination negatively impacts the employment of women in managerial positions, reducing their likelihood of attaining such roles. These findings, summarized in Table (5), provide valuable insights into the factors influencing women's employment in managerial positions in 2023.

Table 5. Results of the estimation of factors affecting employing women in managerial positions

$(Managewoman)$	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)
C	-16.3 [-5.95] (0.000)	-16.1 [-5.95] (0.000)	-16.7 [-6.16] (0.000)	-14.3 [-5.64] (0.000)	-15.48 [-5.60] (0.000)
age	0.39 [3.07] (0.002)	0.33 [2.68] (0.007)	0.32 [2.68] (0.000)	0.42 [3.61] (0.000)	0.36 [2.89] (0.004)
age^2	-0.0035 [-2.32] (0.020)	-0.003 [-2.19] (0.029)	-0.003 [-2.17] (0.30)	-0.004 [-3.28] (0.001)	-0.003 [-2.15] (0.032)
$head$	-3 [-7.80] (0.000)	-	-	-	-3.16 [-7.97] (0.000)
$marry$	-	-0.64 [-2.16] 0.031	-	-	-
$higedu$	3.56 (4.93) [0.000]	4.2 [5.84] (0.000)	4.14 [5.75] (0.000)	-	3.46 [4.78] (0.000)
dim	-0.1 [-0.92] (0.356)	-	-	-	-
$nedu$	-	0.013 [0.13] (0.900)	-	-	-
$nlab$	-	-	0.48 [2.83] (0.005)	0.5 [3.58] (0.000)	
$incother$	-	-	-0.81 [-2.92] (0.003)	-0.98 [-3.56] (0.000)	-
gen	-	-	-	-0.7 [-2.34] (0.019)	-0.62 [-1.94] (0.052)
$LR\,chi2$	253.25 (0.000)	154.24 (0.000)	170.15 (0.000)	54.76 (0.000)	255.84 (0.000)
$Log\;\;likelihood$	-303.7	-353.2	-345.2	-402.96	-302.42

Source: findings of the research

Table 6. Presents the results of the final effects of factors influencing the employment of female managers. The findings from the five models are summarized as follows:

First Model:1-If the age variable increases by one unit, the probability of a woman holding a managerial position increase by 0.22%. 2-Women with higher education are 1.9% more likely to hold managerial positions compared to women without higher education.3-The head of household variable, with a positive sign, indicates that female heads of households are less likely to accept managerial positions. Specifically, working female heads of households are 1.6% less likely to hold managerial positions than women who are not heads of households.4-The household dimension variable indicates that as the number of family members increases, women's willingness to accept managerial positions decreases.

Second Model:1-If the age variable increases by one unit, the probability of a woman holding a managerial position increase by 0.19%. 2-The marital status variable, with a negative sign, shows that married women are less likely to accept managerial positions than single women. Married women are 0.37% less likely to hold managerial positions compared to single women. 3-The higher education variable, with a positive sign, indicates that women with university education are 2.4% more likely to hold managerial positions than women without higher education. 4-The number of educated people in the household has a negative but insignificant effect on the employment of women in managerial positions.

Third Model:1-If the age variable increases by one unit, the probability of a woman holding a managerial position increases by 0.19%. 2-The higher education variable, with a positive sign, indicates that women with university education are 2.3% more likely to hold managerial positions than women without higher education. 3-The number of working people in the household, with a positive sign, suggests that as the number of employed

family members increases, women's willingness to accept managerial positions also increases. 4-Miscellaneous incomes have a negative effect on the employment of women in managerial positions. Women with non-work-related income are 0.46% less likely to hold managerial positions than women without such income.

Fourth Model:1-If the age variable increases by one unit, the probability of a woman holding a managerial position increases by 0.24%. 2-The number of working people in the household, with a positive sign, indicates that as the number of employed family members increases, women's willingness to accept managerial positions also increases. 3-Miscellaneous incomes have a negative effect on the employment of women in managerial positions. Women with non-work-related income are 0.56% less likely to hold managerial positions than women without such income. 4-The income gender discrimination variable has a negative effect on the employment of women in managerial positions.

Fifth Model:1-If the age variable increases by one unit, the probability of a woman holding a managerial position increase by 0.2%. 2-The head of household variable, with a positive sign, indicates that female heads of households are less likely to accept managerial positions. Specifically, working female heads of households are 1.7% less likely to hold managerial positions than women who are not heads of households. 3-The higher education variable, with a positive sign, indicates that women with university education are 1.9% more likely to hold managerial positions than women without higher education. 4-The income gender discrimination variable has a negative effect on the employment of women in managerial positions in Table 6.

Table 6. Final results of factors affecting employing women in managerial positions

$(Managewoman)$	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)
age	0.0022 [2.92] (0.003)	0.0019 [2.57] (0.010)	0.0019 [2.57] (0.010)	0.0024 [3.33] (0.001)	0.002 [2.76] (0.006)
age^2	-0.00002 [-2.25] (0.024)	-0.00002 [-2.12] (0.034)	-0.00002 [-2.11] (0.35)	-0.00003 [-3.07] (0.002)	-0.00002 [-2.09] (0.037)
head	-0.016 [-6.09] (0.000)	-	-	-	-0.017 [-6.20] (0.000)
marry	-	-0.0037 [-2.10] (0.035)	-	-	-
higedu	0.019 (4.37) [0.000]	0.024 [4.85] (0.000)	0.023 [4.82] (0.000)	-	0.019 [4.26] (0.000)
dim	-0.0006 [-0.92] (0.358)	-	-	-	-
nedu	-	0.000075 [0.13] (0.900)	-	-	-
nlab	-	-	0.0027 [2.71] (0.007)	0.0029 [3.31] (0.001)	-
incother	-	-	-0.0046 [-2.78] (0.005)	-0.0056 [-3.29] (0.001)	-
gen	-	-	-	-0.004 [-2.26] (0.024)	-0.003 [-1.91] (0.056)

Source: findings of the research

6. Conclusion

1- The world is moving toward greater gender equality in the twenty-first century. As a result, the gender equality improvement index is trending positively, with governments and citizens worldwide recognizing the importance of advancing gender equality. Experiences, theories, and research demonstrate that a nation will lag behind global development if it fails to address the need for gender equality, neglects the well-being and satisfaction of women, and excludes gender equality from its plans and policies. Gender equality is a critical and sensitive aspect of development, and ignoring it poses a significant threat to sustainable development. 2-The findings of this article indicate that Iran ranks very poorly on the gender inequality index. It is among the four nations with the worst records of gender disparity globally. 3-While the proportion of highly educated women in Iran is increasing, their participation in management, policymaking, and decision-making remains severely limited. This paradox highlights the disconnect between the growing educational achievements of women and their restricted roles in leadership and governance. 4-The empirical findings of this article, based on various models incorporating individual, social, and economic variables derived from household income and expenditure data, reveal the following: Positive and significant factors: Increasing age, higher education, the number of literate people, and the number of working people in a household positively influence women's willingness to accept managerial positions. Negative and significant factors: Being the head of the household, being married, household size, miscellaneous incomes, and gender discrimination negatively affect women's willingness to accept managerial positions in Iran. 5-Based on the findings of this article, and considering the widespread protests by Iranian women in 2023 and the ongoing discontent that followed, it is evident that gender issues are a critical concern. The ruling class should focus on structural reforms that enhance the efficiency and rights of women, who constitute half of society, particularly the more educated members of this group. The theory, experience, and

research presented in this article all support the conclusion that Iran's significant gender gap is a major obstacle to achieving comprehensive and sustainable development. 6-Given the importance of gender equality, justice, and equal opportunities in the economy, and recognizing the potential of women to influence national policies, it is recommended that the government: Include women in the management system in both mid-term and long-term plans. Promote their participation in decision-making and policymaking processes. Remove restrictions by developing indicators for the selection, appointment (based on merit), and evaluation of managers. Create an equal and inclusive environment to ensure the presence of successful managers, regardless of gender, for the country's development. 7-It is essential to identify the factors influencing women's achievements in managerial positions and to assess the extent and direction of these factors. This understanding should inform the development of economic programs and policies aimed at selecting and appointing managers in the public sector. Special attention should be given to policymaking that ensures equality of opportunities while also considering the conditions necessary for women to contribute effectively to development programs.

Authors' contributions
All authors had contribution in preparing this paper.

Conflicts of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest

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