Original Research Article

The Effect of Women Empowerment on Poverty Alleviation in Mezam Division-Cameroon

Ayuk Takemeyang[1*], Henry Jong Ketuma[1]

[1]PhD Fellow, ICT University, Messassi, Zoatupsi, Yaoundé, Cameroon

*Corresponding Author: Ayuk Takemeyang
PhD Fellow, ICT University, Messassi, Zoatupsi, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Abstract: Unequal opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty and gain more options to improve their living standards. Women are economically disadvantaged: for example, culturally, they do not own any property; girls are marginalized in education whereby some parents prefer to take boys to good schools and do not like to take girls to good schools. This study intends to examine the effect of various dimensions of women empowerment on multiple constituents of household poverty in the six-sub divisions of Mezam division. The primary data was gathered from a sample of 319 married and employed females who live in Mezam division. For analysis, the study develops its own all-embracing Women Empowerment and Household Poverty variables using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and examines the relationship between the empowerment of women and household poverty using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results show that women empowerment positively and significantly contributes towards household poverty reduction. The results of the study suggest that in addition to targeting poverty directly, policies should be devised that eradicate poverty through the empowerment of women.

Keywords: Women Empowerment; Household Poverty Alleviation

INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Platform for Action indicated that there are 12 critical areas of priority to achieve the advancement and empowerment of women. These were reviewed by the Commission on the status of women and it has since 1996 been making annual recommendations to have been adopted so as to accelerate the implementation of the platform. The twelve areas included: Women and poverty, Education and training of women, Women and health, Violence against women, Women and armed conflict, Women and the economy, Women in power and decision making, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, Human rights of women, Women and the media, Women and the Environment, and the Girl child. One of the MDG is to ensure gender equality. A World Bank Policy Research Report (2011) presented that women have been denied the strongest rights to land in areas where they inherit land and this is common in countries of SSA.

According to World Bank Policy Research Report (2018), in Cameroon, women are marginalized though, they contribute a lot while looking after their families; for instance, they cultivate land, raise up children, rear animals, contribute much in buying household items such as plates, spoons, sauce pans, pay school fees for their children, to mention but a few. However, men marginalize them yet they would be promoters of economic development. The government of Cameroon is working hard to help empower women in order to reduce poverty especially through the creation of the ministry of women empowerment and the family in order to cater for their specific needs. But women still depend on their husbands and empowerment of women is therefore essential in order to alleviate poverty. According to World Bank (1992), growing poverty mainly affects women since they are solely responsible for providing for the subsistent needs of their families. Cameroon attaches a lot of importance to its local customs and traditions which widely affects women's status since it does not give them as much protection as modern equality laws (Ngassa, 1999).

Most societies in Cameroon are basically patriarchal with cultural differences accounting for the different forms of treatment between men and women and unequal social consideration. The status of Cameroonian women depends largely on the perception that society has of their role, and life in most households is based on the supremacy of men and subordination of women. Women in Cameroon are considered subject to male authority. Male characteristics are considered central to the decision-making process at family, community and national levels. Cultural barriers that subject women to men include rules of inheritances, births, deaths, work, child care and reproduction and a host of traditional rites (Ntenkeh, 2021).

This study is important because it provide knowledge about women empowerment and the fight against gender discrimination. Women are the primary care givers and they have an important role in the alleviation of household poverty. The research uses the descriptive and the explanatory approaches to meet the objectives set above. It is divided in sections. After this introductory section, section 2 defines women empowerment, poverty alleviation and the conceptual framework, section 3 provides the methodology, section 4 presents the results and their interpretation and section 5 give the concluding remarks and recommendations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATIONS

Women in Cameroon have long suffered powerlessness, discrimination and gender inequality in terms of access, use and ownership of vital resources despite their key role in enhancing development in general. According to Abubakri (2015), gender inequality is a major cause of poverty. Women empowerment is a major concern for people who are incapable of or denied access to participating in labour, formal, informal, or agricultural. In 2009, the United Nations (UN) estimated that 60 per cent of the world's chronically hungry people are women and girls, 40% of whom live in developing nations.

Unequal opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift them from poverty and gain more options to improve on their living standards. Women perform the bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures. In many societies, existing norms dictate that girls and women have the main responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and the sick, as well as for running the household, including the provision of water and energy supplies. These hinder women chances of being properly educated or being able to translate returns on their own productive work into increased and more secure incomes, better working conditions and increase standard of living (World Bank, 2012). This study intends to examine the effect of various dimensions of women empowerment on multiple constituents of household poverty in Cameroon.

Dimensions of Women's Empowerment

It is important to understand the dimensions of women's empowerment, especially as it can help to deduce development intervention that strive to foster changes, enhance food security and reduce poverty in the household and society at large. The dimensions of women's empowerment range from women's personal, economic and social empowerment.

Women's Political Empowerment

Given that women's political empowerment is critical to modern states, the recommendations and declaration of a wide range of international bodies-led primarily by the United Nations, but including the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Africa Union, Southern Africa Development Community, Commonwealth, Council of Europe, European Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and Organization of American State-urge member states to achieve a minimum of 30 percent women in all elected position (Krook 2006; Towns, 2010; Nisha & Venthan, 2018). The political empowerment of women is the process of advancing women's political interests (Rajput, 2001; Tiwari, 2001). Political empowerment enhances the transfer of the various elements of power (resources, capabilities, and positions) to women who previously did not have it (Mayoux, 2006). This gives women the capability to analyses, organize and mobilize, participate in collective action for changes, which is related to the empowerment of citizens to claim their rights and entitlement (Piron & Walkins, 2004).

According to Matenda (2006), women's political empowerment refers to the ability of women to advocate for policy change, and demand better service provisions such as women's rights to vote and be represented in parliament and in the local government. It is also about their ability to influence policy making demand and calling the state to account (OECD, 2012). The political empowerment of women includes the exercise of choice by women as to whether to take part in decision making issues and structure and eventually, being able to influence outcomes in the political sector. For poverty, education and health outcomes to be improved upon, the empowerment of women needs to be examined politically. This is because the SDG on gender equality made it clear that providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large (Trotter, 2017).

The political dimension of women's empowerment therefore involves women's freedom to make decisions on voting and the opportunity to contest in politics, be involved in political decision making which will enable women to able to raise their grievances (Mujahid *et al.*, 2015). Women's political empowerment, should be viewed as a fundamental process of transformation for benchmarking and understanding more generally, what political power empowerment gains across the globe (Alexander *et al.*, 2016). Sunstrom *et al.*, (2015) developed a women's empowerment global index known as the V-Dem which assesses women without acknowledging interesting disadvantage for women who are also racial, ethnic, or religious minorities. This new indicator of Women's political empowerment opens up new possibilities of examining the determinants of variation in women's political empowerment over time and across countries.

The political empowerment of women all over the world varies from one country to another. Women are in executive and legislative positions in countries like Argentina, Sweden, and Rwanda (Montemarano, 2011; Paxton *et al.*, 2007). While every country in Africa and the Americas has had at least one woman as a minister, the Pacific regions had no woman in these top positions. The women's movement in the United States of America since 1975, has provided great impetus for the steady growth of the number of women in office. There were thirty-one women in congress and six female governors, constituting the highest number of women at the uppermost political level in 2014 (Clark, 1991; Le Sexe Droit au Cameroun 2014). To enhance women's political empowerment, Cameroon has ratified the main international and regional instruments aimed at promoting women's right and political participation in all spheres of life (Doffonsouet *et al.*, 2014). Accordingly, the 1995 Beijing platform of Action called on government all over the world, to take full measure to ensure that women had equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

Several declarations have been made by the African Union (AU) on the promotion of the full political participation of women in leadership and processes in African countries. These declarations include Article 4(1) of the Constitutive Act the African Union, the Dakar platform for Action (1994), African Plan of Action to Accelerate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing platforms for Action for the advancement of Women (1999), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Pe4olpe Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the 2004 African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (Kah & Tembi, 2018). In spite of the above instrument to enhance women's political empowerment and representation in Africa and Cameroon in particular, practical implementation becomes a problem.

According to Kah & Tembi (2018), Cameroon's constitutions maintain the principle of gender equality, but several social, legal, religious and cultural factors militate against it. The election governing body in Cameroon, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) preserves the sociological and gender representations in the composition of electoral lists by political parties. In the 2013 general elections, 20 out of 48 party lists were rejected, for failing to respect the gender requirement (Gender Empowerment and Development, 2010; Center for Democracy and Electoral Studies, 2013). According to the written statement of the Advocates for Human Right submitted to Cameroon's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2014, even though women represent over 51% of Cameroon's over 22 million inhabitants, they are grossly underrepresented in the executive and legislative positions of decision0making. While little progress has been made in enhancing women's political empowerment, activists' voices still call for women's political empowerment and representation within the country to go beyond window dressing.

Women's Economic Empowerment
Women's economic empowerment is more concern with women's participation in the labour market. Addressing the constraints to women's economic empowerment is fundamental to food security, poverty, the achievement of gender equality and a lasting, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. The economic empowerment of women refers to the process of according women the power to become "bread winners", to be self-reliant, to generate income from project and fight poverty (Elliot, 2008).

According to Golla *et al.*, (2011), a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions. For women to advance and succeed economically, they need resources and skills to compete in the labour market, as well as fair and equal access to economic institutions. Under this dimension, the contributions of women through non-market fields, such as care work which is unpaid and how it ultimately influences their full participation in the labour force needs to be taken into account (Chopra &Muller, 2016).

Women's economic empowerment is perceived as the main policy in addressing gender inequality, and as a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth (Dominic & Jothi 2012). The economic empowerment of women increases their real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society (Sida, 2009). According to Jahan & Nurlukma (2017), the fight against poverty is directly linked to women's economic empowerment and it actually the type associated with empowerment and the first step towards empowering women. This further enhances their current wealth and well-being of nations. Some studies have shown an inversely relationship between this dimension

of women's empowerment and fertility rate as women who are economically empowered and control their income tend to have fewer children (Ushma *et al*., 2014; Patidar, 2018).

However, Khadar (2011) cautioned against emphasizing on increased access and control over income as the main domain of women's empowerment. What is imperative is that it should improve on the general conditions of women's life, focusing mainly on women's need and reasons to value. Women who are economically empowered usually invest a higher proportion of their earned income in the household aimed at ensuring proper dietary diversity of household members in particular and improving household welfare in general. To enhance women's economic empowerment implies that women must have access to and control over resources such as land, financial and physical resources and suitable human capital. Such resources will enable women to pursue and secure sustainable incomes and livelihoods (Sida, 2009).

Women's Social Empowerment

Social empowerment is the system of accessing possibilities, in addition to resources in order to make individual choices and have some control over our environment like education, health, nutrition, safe water, sanitation, housing, shelter, science and technology (Jahan & Nurlukma, 2017). Women's social empowerment is closely related to the socio-cultural aspects of the society in which women live. This dimension of women's empowerment includes families, social capital, cultural and informational forms of empowerment (Sharaunga, 2015). The focus of the social empowerment of women is the change in power relations at the family, community and society level with women generally aware of their rights and needs. This will go a long way to enable women change the way they see themselves. Generally, women are disproportionately represented in the society and property rights continue to favour more men than women (Duflo, 2012).
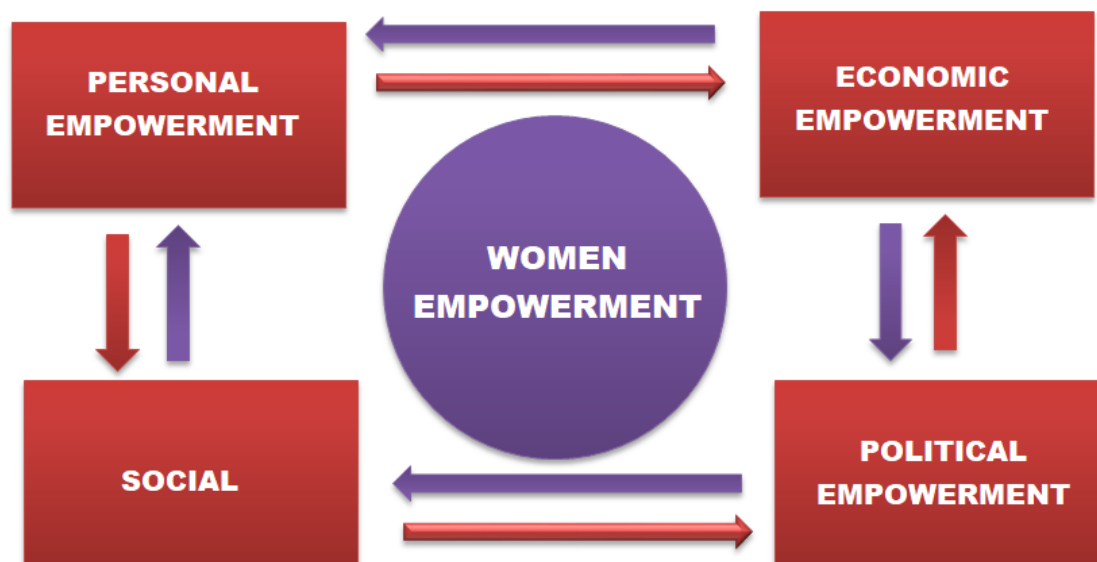

Figure 1: Interrelation among the Dimensions of Women
Source: Conceived and constructed by author (2024)

Conceptualization of Poverty Cameroon

The poverty issue in Cameroon is multifaceted; one that will take a lot of patience and intentional intervention in order to combat with education being the primary barrier between those living in poverty and those who are not (Peart, 2019). In Cameroon, we fine people who lack the means to acquire their basic needs. As such, it makes it impossible for them to achieve their goal. Hence, all three concept of poverty apply well in the Cameroonian context. According to Kamgnia (2007), 52% of people in poor household in Cameroon are women, and those under 15years of age with the major causes of poverty including: lack of job opportunities, declining income, poor infrastructures and even illiteracy which inhibits the household from improving on its welfare. The poorest regions in the country are mostly the rural areas. According to Dover (2017), out of Cameroon's more than 23 million people, 24% in live in poverty, and 55% of those in poverty live rural communities. 61% of Cameroonian household were poor and most women are the bead winners.

The results of the fourth Cameroon Household Survey conducted in 2014 indicated that out of an estimated population of 21,657,488 in 2014,37.5% were poor (INS, 2014). This implies that 8,088,876 people live below the poverty line, with approximately eight out of ten household heads (77.3%) considering themselves poor in 2014.Accordingly, an estimated 775.1 billion FCFA which correspond to about 23.4% of the State budget of that year was needed to be distributed to poor people to lift them out of poverty (INS, 2014).

Women's Socioeconomic Status in Cameroon

According to Cameroon's Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2011, the occupation rate among women was 68.1% while that among men was 87.2%, giving a significant gap of 19.1 percentage points (INS, 2011). Thus, in terms of probability, the men have 28% more chances than women to carry an economic activity. This inadequate representation of women constitutes an underutilization of their economic potential in terms of human capital resources, which Cameroon could fully draw in order to accelerate the process of emergence. Cameroon was ranked 118 out of 134 countries in 2009 in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index and 141 among the 189 countries ranked in relation to their level of gender inequality (UNDP, 2017). The Gender Index Gap report assesses countries on how well they are dividing their resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, irrespective of the overall levels of these resources and opportunities. In some part of Cameroon, daughters are also seen as only good for marriage and also undervalued and some of them end up getting married at an early age. Early marriage of girls is highly prevalence in the north and far north which leads to early motherhood. Women are underrepresented in science and technology with less than 21% of women from 2003-2007 taking up the science subjects.

The civil code of Cameroon in its article 7 permits the husband to oppose the rights to work in separate profession by his wife. According to Tambi *et al.*, (2017), Cameroonian women by virtue of cultural norms are among the most marginalized labour groups. They leave home in the morning, trek over long distances farms, toil the whole day, and return home to get to the kitchen to being preparing food for the household. In the night, these female farm workers usually have to face sexual harassment from their male counterparts. These same women are expected to rise early in the morning, fetch and split firewood, cook and prepare children for school, and finally serve their husband's food and other people in the home, before preparing to go work in the farm. Women's adaptation to this routine household cultural practice tends to propagate itself from generation to generation, making poverty endemic among the poor women within Cameroon. Hence enhancing women's capabilities, will go a long way to overcome this culturalism theory of poverty within Cameroon at the individual, household, community and country level.

Empirical Review/Hypotheses Development
A large body of literature presents evidence related to the women empowerment-poverty link.

Sraboni *et al.*, (2014) examined the effect of women's empowerment in Agriculture (WEAI) on food security in Bangladesh. They used data from Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS) conducted from December 2011 to March 2012. Sraboni *et al.*, (2014) used the iverg2 procedure to correct potential endogeneity. Their findings after instrumenting for potential endogeneity show that an increase in the women's empowerment score will positively and significantly increase food security by 891.9 for per capital calorie availability and 1.9 for household dietary diversity. The result further illustrates that the age of household head by one more pear will lead to a decrease on household dietary diversity by 0.02 units. Further, the household size is positively related to household dietary diversity by 0.08.

Mahbuh (2017) investigated on the impact of women's empowerment on food and nutritional security of children, adults and the household in general. He used data from the Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS 2012), with a sample of 3,843 agricultural households broken down into of 9,900 individuals of the the adult subsample, of which 4,944 are male and 6,956 are female. He further used the IV approach to solve for the potential problem endogeneity between the women's empowerment index and the disturbance term in the OLS regression due to the household specific omitted gender norms. Mahbuh (2017) findings revealed that women's empowerment leads to a significant increase in calorie and protein intake (dietary diversity) among children, adult and the household members in general.

Wourtese (2016) explored the effect of empowerment on agricultural production in rural households in Niger. She used primary data collection from 500 randomly sampled households comprising of 769 adult individuals during April-May 2015. The IV estimation technique of a constant-coefficient augmented Cobb-Douglas agricultural production function at the farm household level is employed for the analysis. The findings reveal a positive and significant effect of empowerment on agricultural productivity. A 1% average increase agricultural production by 1.5%. however, Wourtese (2016) made use of the WEAI but considered empowerment for the women and men in general in her analysis.

Also, Wouterse (2016) considered the role of empowerment on agricultural production without considering the effect of increased agricultural production on household food security. Furthermore, she did not consider other exogenous variables that may affect empowerment such as age, being married, household size religion among others. Urban and Rural differences in empowerment and agricultural production between urban and rural Niger were not take into consideration by the study

Also, in Nigeria, Azeez *et al.*, (2018) investigated the impact of women's empowerment on food security among rural households in Kwara State. They used a three-stage random sampling technique to select a total of 150 rural households from ten communities who provided information for the data used for the study. They used Correlation Analysis to analyze the data collected from the survey. Their results indicated a positive and significant correlation between women's

empowerment and food security status of rural households. An increase in the level of women's empowerment will increase household food status by 0.25 units. The study of Azeez *et al*., (2018) was limited by the fact that they did not take into account the problem of potential indigeneity due to causal relationship between women's empowerment and food security which may lead to based estimates. Moreover, the sample size is relatively small for the generalization of the result to the entire population and a majority of the households in the study area were male headed, who responded to the questionnaire relative to women.

Sharaunga (2015) examined the effect of women's empowerment on household food security in the ruralkwaZulu-Nata province in South Africa. He used primary data collected from 300 rural women sampled and the order logit model to identify the dimensions of women's empowerment that influence their household food security status. His findings revealed that an increase in women's economic agency, physical capital endowment and psychological empowerment increases the probability of the household being food security by 0.21, 0.07 and 0.08. This is because empowerment increase women's access to and control over productive resources, increases household livelihood diversity and decreases the barriers women face to access markets. The study did not account for potential endogeneity that may arise between the dimensions of women's empowerment and the indicators food security considered.

In Cameroon, Tambi *et al*., (2017) examined the effects of women in agricultural production on food security. They used data from the 2011 Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey and the instrumental variable (2SLS) model in investigating this effect. Results from the2SLs revealed that increase in the number of women in agricultural production will increase food security by 0.189. Thus, according to Tambi *et al*., (2017), there is a positive and significant correlation between women in agricultural production and food security in Cameroon. Their findings also show that mother's education labour market participation, household size, and being a member of a professional association, enhances food security in Cameroon.

Nonetheless, Tambi *et al*., (2017) limited their study area to rural Cameroon without taking into consideration Urban Cameroon which is also vulnerable to problems associated to food security. Furthermore, food security which is the outcome variable for their study is measured by the average quality of rice in kilograms produced. Rice production is not the only determinant of food security of food security in Cameroon, and does not solely account for calorie and protein intake as well as household dietary diversity. Besides, their focus is on women in agricultural production without looking at how these women can be empowered even within the agricultural sector to enhance food security.

It is commonly argued that women's empowerment is crucial for poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth in the developing countries (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009). Empirical research has shown that enhancing women's capabilities to make choice will lead to the transformation of these choices into desire outcomes such as poverty reduction. Regarding the effect of women's empowerment on household poverty, Nadim & Nurlukam (2017) qualitatively investigated the impact of women's empowerment on poverty reduction in rural areas of Bangladesh focusing on village development programme. They made use of correlation data using structured questionnaire from a sample of 200 women. They made use of t analysis. Their result from the self-assessment question "if women's empowerment is important for poverty reduction" showed that about 63% of women agreed that women's empowerment is important in poverty reduction.

Wei *et al*., (2021) investigated on the influence of women's empowerment on poverty reduction in the rural areas of Bangladesh. They made used of primary data from a sample of 914 individuals collected from well-structured interview. They made used both the OLS and logit method in analyzing the effect of women's empowerment on poverty as a continuous dependent variable and as a binary dependent respectively. On the effect women's empowerment on income poverty, the results indicated that a percentage point increase in women's empowerment, will reduce income poverty by 0.1% and the income poverty gap by 0.01%. On the effect of women empowerment on multidimensional poverty a percentage point increase in women's empowerment will reduce multidimensional poverty by 0.10% and multidimensional poverty intensity by 0.57%.

Uzoamaka *et al*., (2016) examined women's empowerment as a panacea for poverty reduction and economic dev elopement in Nigeria. They used data primary and secondary sources from a sample of 267 selected women entrepreneurs registered with National Association of Small Scale Industries in Enugu state Pearson correlation in carrying out the investigation. Their study found out that women's empowerment is strongly correlated with poverty with a correlation coefficient of 0.73. This implies increasing women's empowerment will strongly reduce poverty. However, their findings were virtually qualitative, lacking empirical verification to objectively access the relationship.

Yeboah *et al*., (2018) carried out a descriptive study on the nexus between women's empowerment and poverty reduction in the Ho municipality in urban Ghana. They sourced data from 65 women using the purposive sampling technique. They used a descriptive narrative method to analyze the qualitative data obtained. Their results showed 32 respondents advocating the need to empower women with employment skills, to reduce household poverty; 17 respondents

believed women should be empowered through education and 12 suggested financial empowerment of women to reduce household poverty. Only 4 respondents advocated agricultural empowerment as a means to reduce household poverty. However, the study of Yeboah *et al.*, (2018) was purely qualitative void of quantitative analysis; hence lack of empirical verification and the control of econometric problems. Despite that, the result illustrated some of the vital domains in empowering women for welfare outcomes.

In Cameroon, Nkemnyi *et al.*, (2017) assessed the role of women in development and poverty alleviation in Cameroon. They used data collected from a sample of 222 women through questionnaires and focus group discussions. In addition, they also obtained from field observations which principally involved witnessing women's participation in development and poverty alleviation at the level of household and community. They used descriptive narrative to analyze their data. Their results revealed a significant correlation between women's formal occupation and household income level.

Lumsi (2012) carried a study on microfinance and their effort to assist women fight poverty in Cameroon. She used from 15 women selected through a snow ball sampling technique from two microfinance corporations each. She used a descriptive narrative method in analyzing the data. The results revealed that microfinance greatly enhances women's capability in fighting against poverty. This is done through the granting of loans to women which permits them to carry out lucrative activities, that make life worthy of living for them and also increase their decision-making power. Besides, microfinance organizations have varied activities that help to empower Cameroonian women in their effort in poverty reduction.

Gaps Identified
This research has identified the following gaps which it intends to fill;
Concluding this review, we can see certain gaps in the literature. Firstly, the majority of the past studies have limited generalizability because they use already available surveys or published data, having limited dimensions of women empowerment and household poverty. There are rarely any studies (as best known to the researcher) that account for the comprehensive nature of the phenomenon of women empowerment dimensions and household poverty. Therefore, because of minimal comprehensive investigation, the examination of the effect of women empowerment on household poverty remains a topic of interest for the researchers.

Secondly, the studies that investigate the impact of women empowerment on household poverty do not use any sophisticated techniques. The majority of the studies only use descriptive analysis or chi-square. Therefore, to fill these research gaps, there is a need to conduct a research-based study in Punjab, Pakistan by using more sophisticated and advanced techniques. Secondly, almost all of the studies review are based on the rural areas and excluded the urban areas which are also vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty. In Cameroon, Tambi *et al.*, 2017 limited the scope of their rural Cameroon, while most of the studies reviewed for Bangladesh were limited the rural Bangladesh. This research takes into consideration urban and rural Cameroon in examining the relationship between women's empowerment, food security and poverty. Besides, there is a growing phenomenon of the 'serving class' in the urban areas who are employed by mostly the well-to-do. The employment of such classes of people will definitely have an effect on their household food security and poverty in the urban areas where they live.

Furthermore, in most of the studies on the role of women and women's empowerment on outcome variables in Cameroon have been virtually qualitative with very few quantitative studies (Lumsi, 2012, Nkemnyi *et al.*, 2017). Hence, this research adds to the scope of quantitative research in the examination of women's empowerment, food security and poverty in Cameroon. Furthermore, the sample size used in the study of Nkemye *et al.*, (2017) was relatively small to paint a true picture of women's role in development and poverty in Cameroon.

Studies like that of Galie *et al.*, (2019) considered only domain of women's empowerment which is livestock ownership. The study considers a woman who does not own livestock as being disempowered. In reality, one can be disempowered in one domain but empowered in others (Malhorta *et al.*, 2002). This explains why this research constituted an index of the different variables which enhance women's empowerment in Cameroon using the Multiple Correspondence Analysis.

Development of Variables and Hypothesis
Women Empowerment Variable
Six dimensions of women empowerment, namely economic, familial, psychological, socio-cultural, political, and legal empowerment, were identified by Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002). Out of these, the first four concern households and communities while the other two operate at the regional or national level. Therefore, since the present study is a household-level study, it only considers economic, familial, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions of empowerment. Economic empowerment means women's economic contribution to the well-being of their family as well as their access to and control over their family's assets and income (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002). Familial empowerment implies

the involvement of a woman in important decision-making within her family, the right to choose her husband and time to get married, control over the marital relationship and family planning as well as protection from domestic violence (Malhotra *et al*., 2002). Psychological empowerment is a blend of self-efficacy, self-esteem, psychological well-being, and self-awareness (Chhanda & Dasgupta, 2018; Malhotra *et al*., 2002). Socio-cultural empowerment refers to the freedom in women's mobility, lack of discrimination against daughters, and a dedication towards educating them (Malhotra *et al*., 2002).

Household Poverty Variable

The concept of poverty is complex and a single measure cannot be used to capture this complexity. Therefore, multiple indicators should be used to capture poverty in all its facets. A Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed by the UNDP, identifies that how, at the individual or household level, people are deprived across three key dimensions: education, health, and the standard of living. Following the basis of MPI, the present study uses education, health, and the standard of living as the key dimensions to measure poverty. Figure 2 below shows the relationship between Women Empowerment and Household Poverty variables, highlighting the dimensions used for measuring each variable.
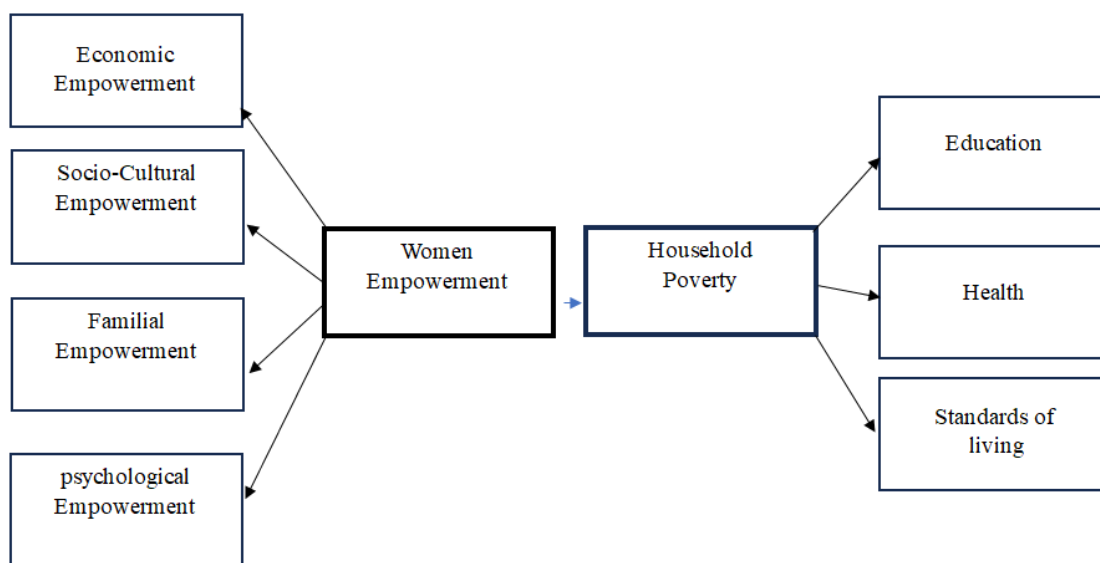

Figure 2: Dimensions for 'Women Empowerment' and 'Household Poverty' Variables
Source: Authors (2024)

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the pragmatism epistemology of positivism. A quantitative method approach is adopted for the study. The study will use a conclusive design. The quantitative research method was chosen in line with the research objectives and aim at examining the relationship between variables (Crotty, 2003). Data was collected using a questionnaire designed using a Likert scale format. This study will use the deductive approach. To examine the impact of women empowerment on household poverty, a survey-based study is conducted in Cameroon. This study makes use of the ex-post-facto research design. According to Cohen *et al*., (2007) the ex-post-facto is appropriate when a researcher takes the effect and examines the data retrospectively in order to establish the causes, relationships and their meanings.

The target population for the present study is the married and employed females of age 18 years or above belonging to the study area. The study uses a multistage sampling method for data collection. In the first stage, Mezam Division of the North West region of Cameroon is selected. Thereafter, the work make used of all sub divisions of this division. Cochran's (1977) formula was used for calculating the appropriate sample size. The research sample size will be calculated as follows:

Sample Size Calculation:
i.   Measurement scale = n (n-number of scale) n = 5
ii. Standard deviation = n/(n-1) = 5/4 =1.25
iii. Confidence intervals = 95%
iv. Z-score @ 95% = 1.96
v.   Error margin 5%. two field tests for normal distribution = 5/2 = 0.025
vi. Unknown population

Formula = Z2 S2
(n*alpha/2)2
N0 =(1.962) *(1.25)2
(5 *0.0252) = 384
Sample size for unknown population = 384 Assumed 3% of known retention of questionnaire Missing = 3% * 384 = 12
Approve sample = 384 + 12 = 396
For known population
Assumed population size 1,500 N1 = 396
(1 + 396/1500) = 313
Assumed 2% of known retention of questionnaire Missing = 2% * 313 = 6
Approve sample = 319
Questionnaire were administered to 319 women entrepreneurs in Mezam Division which is equal to the approve sample size.

This study uses a cross-sectional research design because it allows collecting data from the population over a shorter period. It is even the cheapest and less time-consuming research design than others, easily collects data, and excludes the recurring mistakes which were common in longitudinal research design (Bongomin *et al.*, 2016). The study adopted a quantitative, method of data analysis and supported by the epistemology underpinnings of positivism and an ontological approach of objectivism. The research was guided by four objectives and hypotheses which were design tested quantitatively using data collected from questionnaire survey of 319 respondents and a regression analysis was done to confirm or validate the hypothesis and interpret the results. The distribution of the questionnaires was based on a convenience sampling and a snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling. Data source for this study is the primary source. Data will be analyzed using SPSS and Amos statistical software.

Operationalization of Variables
Women Empowerment Variable
Six dimensions of women empowerment, namely economic, familial, psychological, socio-cultural, political, and legal empowerment, were identified by Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002). Out of these, the first four concern households and communities while the other two operate at the regional or national level. Therefore, since the present study is a household-level study, it only considers economic, familial, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions of empowerment.

Economic empowerment means women's economic contribution to the well-being of their family as well as their access to and control over their family's assets and income (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002). Familial empowerment implies the involvement of a woman in important decision-making within her family, the right to choose her husband and time to get married, control over the marital relationship and family planning as well as protection from domestic violence (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002). Psychological empowerment is a blend of self-efficacy, self-esteem, psychological well-being, and self-awareness (Chhanda & Dasgupta, 2018; Malhotra *et al.*, 2002). Socio-cultural empowerment refers to the freedom in women's mobility, lack of discrimination against daughters, and a dedication towards educating them (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002).

Table 1: Operationalization of Variables

Independent Variable	Latent Constructs	Indicators	Source (Citations)
Women Empowerment	1. economic empowerment	− women's contribution to the well-being of their family − their access to and control over their family's assets and income	Malhotra *et al.*, 2002 Hanafizadeh P *et al.*, (2014)
	2. socio-cultural empowerment	− freedom in women's mobility − lack of discrimination against daughters, and − a dedication towards educating them	Malhotra *et al.*, 2002 Hanafizadeh P *et al.*, (2014)
	3. Familial empowerment	− the involvement of a woman in important decision-making within her family, − the right to choose her husband and time to get married, − control over the marital relationship and family planning	Malhotra *et al.*, 2002 Venkatesh *et al.*, (2003), Sharma *et al.*, (2017), Venkatesh and Davis (2000)

Independent Variable	Latent Constructs	Indicators	Source (Citations)
		− protection from domestic violence	
	4. Psychological empowerment	− self-efficacy, − self-esteem, − psychological well-being, -self-awareness	Chhanda & Dasgupta, 2018; Malhotra *et al*., 2002

Source: Author's Perception (2024)

Household Poverty Variable

The concept of poverty is complex and a single measure cannot be used to capture this complexity. Therefore, multiple indicators should be used to capture poverty in all its facets. A Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed by the UNDP, identifies that how, at the individual or household level, people are deprived across three key dimensions: education, health, and the standard of living. Following the basis of MPI, the present study uses education, health, and the standard of living as the key dimensions to measure poverty.

Table 2: Operationalization of Dependent Research Constructs

Main Dependent Variable	Latent Constructs	Indicator	Source
Household Poverty	education, health, and the standard of living	Access to credit Savings	Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed by the UNDP

Source: Author's Perception (2024)

3.9.2 Model Specification and Analysis

The measurement specification for the study includes; Goodness fit index (GFI), Incremental fit index (IFI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Normed fit index (NFI), Standardized root means square residual (SRMR), Root means a square error of approximation (RMSEA). The model specification aligned with the hypotheses.

To achieve our objective of measuring women's empowerment, we apply the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) developed first by Benzécri (1973). The construction of our Composite Women's Empowerment Indicator (WE) will rely exclusively on categorical Variables and it is well known in factorial analysis that when dealing with categorical variables, a suitable choice is MCA as it makes fewer assumptions than PCA on the underlying distributions of variables.

Also. the MCA assesses the relationships between variables and studying the associations between the categories; providing a typology of the individuals, that is, studying the similarities between the individuals from a multidimensional perspective; and linking together the study of individuals and that of variables in order to characterize the individuals using the variables (Costa *et al*., 2013: Husson & Josse, 2014) in MCA analyses, each modality for each categorical variable is typically broken down into a 0/1 binary indicator. As PCA, MCA is a data exploration technique that is used to uncover correlation patterns, a cross set of variables described by single components named principal components.

Principal components can be considered as latent unobserved variables that account for the maximum variance of a set of other variables. The first principal component represents the unobserved latent variable that captures the highest variance of all observed variables used in the analysis, and that is therefore the best candidate to represent all the variables considered.

The main difference of this approach from standard econometric approaches is that the dependent variable is unobserved and cannot be used directly to estimate correlation coefficients. As advantage, MCA gives more weight to indicators with a smaller number of hits and allows for the investigation of several qualitative parameters (Sánová *et al*., 2017).

RESULTS/DISCUSSION/IMPLICATION

A Missing Values Analysis (MVA) was conducted using the (Little, 1988) MCAR test to establish whether data are MCAR or MNAR. Further analysis regarding the nomenclature of missing data was completed using the provision of the Little's MCAR test. In addition, the summary outputs of missing data for all values involved in the analysis was less than 5% and thus support the use of the Expectation-Maximization Algorithm (EMA) technique to complete missing data. With the application of EMA our new dataset without missing values was gotten. Following the EFA, resulting outputs revealed appropriate factor loadings with no evidence of cross loadings and no coefficients of less than 0.5. Based on the aforementioned table, dimension reduction was approved and component 1 was retained as relevant for all variables involve variable consistency or inconsistency. EFA was conducted for the independent variables.

Initially, a total of 33 items were used to measure the 'Women Empowerment' variable, however, based on the results of EFA, 15 items were not considered for the final analysis because of their low factor loadings or cross-loadings. In the same way, initially, a total of 17 items were considered for the measurement of the 'Household Poverty' variable. Four items were not considered for the final analysis because of their low factor loadings or cross-loadings and a total of 13 items, having factor loadings greater than 0.30, were considered to measure the 'Household Poverty' variable. Table 3 reports the results of the final EFA.

Table 3: EFA for Women Empowerment and Household Poverty

Statement Name	Statements	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	AVE	CR
Economic Empowerment			0.678	*0.50489*	0.795903
WEE1	Multinational Corporations (MNCs) provide women with increased job opportunities.	0.806			
WEE2	MNCs offer women opportunities for earning higher pays.	0.767			
WEE 3	Over the past years, Information Technology (IT) sector has provided women with increased job opportunities.	0.768			
WEE6	You have control over the purchase of everyday use items (e.g. grocery, vegetables, clothes, refrigerator, fans, TV, etc.) required by your household.	0.438			
Socio-cultural Empowerment			0.701	0.403485	0.795256
WESC4	Your contribution to household income improves your relationship with your family members.	0.438			
WESC7	You suffer from violence in public places.	0.804			
WESC8	You lack access to quality health services.	0.749			
WESC9	You often work under unsafe conditions	0.789			
WESC11	Women's role as wage earners is considered a threat to male dominance in households.	0.517			
Familial Empowerment			0.761	0.513148	0.87342
WEF2	You are involved in making decisions related to family planning.	0.769			
WEF3	You are involved in making decisions to improve your children's academic performance.	0.896			
WEF4	You are involved in making decisions to improve your children's health.	0.934			
WEF5	You are involved in making decisions to improve your living standards.	0.547			
WEF6	You enjoy more power in your household, regarding household decisions than the men in the household.	0.311			
Psychological Empowerment			0.785	0.595478	0.854447
WEP1	You have the opportunity to express yourself freely.	0.701			
WEP2	You are satisfied with your role as a woman (e.g. daughter, mother, or wife).	0.802			
WEP3	You are satisfied with how you fulfill your responsibilities.	0.771			
WEP4	You are independent to make decisions in your life.	0.808			
Standard of Living			0.606	0.435305	0.718494
HPL1	Over the years, you can afford many of those goods that were previously not affordable.	0.747			
HPL2	Many goods that previously were affordable to only a few e.g. mobile phones, laptops, etc. are now common in most households.	0.675			

Statement Name	Statements	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	AVE	CR
HPL3	Increased competition between companies from all over the world is reducing the prices of goods and services.	0.396			
HPL6	Employment is raising your living standard.	0.497			
HPL7	You earn money to maintain a high standard of living.	0.569			
Health			0.609	0.455872	0.763124
HPH1	The use of technology in the field of medicine is reducing the cost of medical treatments.	0.648			
HPH2	Children at your home are underweight due to the lack of availability of healthy food.	0.451			
HPH3	You have enough money to have healthy food for your family.	0.759			
HPH4	You have easy access to clean drinking water (filtered or mineral water, etc.).	0.790			
Education			0.812	0.638574	0.874019
HPE1	The use of advanced facilities, such as multimedia, projectors, smart boards, and Wi-Fi in educational institutions is improving the learning process of the students.	0.751			
HPE3	You have enough money to provide education to your family members.	0.634			
HPE4	You have enough time for focusing on the education of your family members.	0.908			
HPE5	You have enough time for focusing on the upbringing of your family members.	0.874			

Source: Field data (2024)

The results show that the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient is greater than 0.60 for all the latent variables. This confirms the internal consistency reliability. Since the present study is using a higher-order model, there is no need to check the discriminant validity. The convergent validity and construct reliability are checked with the help of average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). The values of AVE and CR must be greater than 0.50 and 0.70 respectively (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). However, convergent validity will still exist if the value of AVE is less than 0.50 and CR is greater than 0.60 (Lam, 2012). Our results, confirm the existence of convergent validity and construct reliability.

CFA is used to test if the number of factors and the loadings conformed with expectations based on previous literature. The first step in CFA is to validate the one-dimensionality of the constructs. The model estimation of CFA is based on whether the proposed model fits the data or not, and if modification is required to increase the fit. Fit indices to be used in this study fit index level of acceptance comment are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Goodness of Fit Indices for CFA Comment

	x2/df	CFI	GFI	IFI	TLI	RMR	RMSEA
Women Empowerment	2.9711	0.959	0.959	0.959	0.948	0.053	0.051
Household Poverty	2.8535	0.952	0.974	0.952	0.934	0.041	0.049

Source: Field data 2024

The values of CFI, GFI, IFI, and TLI for both women empowerment and household poverty are greater than the minimum limit of 0.90. Due to low factor loadings, 3 items for the 'Women Empowerment' construct, namely WEE6, WESC4, and WEF6, and two items for the 'Household Poverty' construct, namely HPL6 and HPH1, are deleted and are not considered for the final analysis. relevant parametric assumptions were carried out including, multivariate normality, multi-colinearity, a test of equal variance, linearity and outlier before proceeding. The probability plot for the distribution was conducted to test for normality and the results revealed that the samples follow a bell-shaped curve indicating a normal distribution.

In addition to the normality probability plot, the p-p plot was conducted for the standardized residual plot of the dependent variable displaying that there is a substantial deviation of the residual plot from the diagonal line thus implying that the distribution is normal and there are no significant outliers in the data sets.

Structural Equation Modeling Analysis and Specification Parameters

SEM is used to assess reliability, validity and to determine relationships between study variables by estimating regression weights, path coefficients, and model fit indices. To use SEM; the data set must be complete without missing values. The study used a structural model to assess the direct and indirect relations between the latent variables. This was done to establish the actual statistical relationships between the variables and compare them with those in the hypothesized model. The structural model was generated and tested for the overall goodness of fit. According to Hair *et al.,* (2010), important model fit tests include baseline indices like the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) (>.95), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (>.95), Chi-square statistic (>.05), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (> .95), Increment Fit Index (IFI) (>.95), and the Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA). Since the values of all the fit indices ($x2/df= 2.9328$, CFI =0.912, GFI=0.927, IFI =0.912, TLI=0.901, RMR= 0.059, RMSEA= 0.048) lie within the desired thresholds level, SEM results show that the model is an excellent fit. The coefficients of various paths in the model are presented in Figure 3.
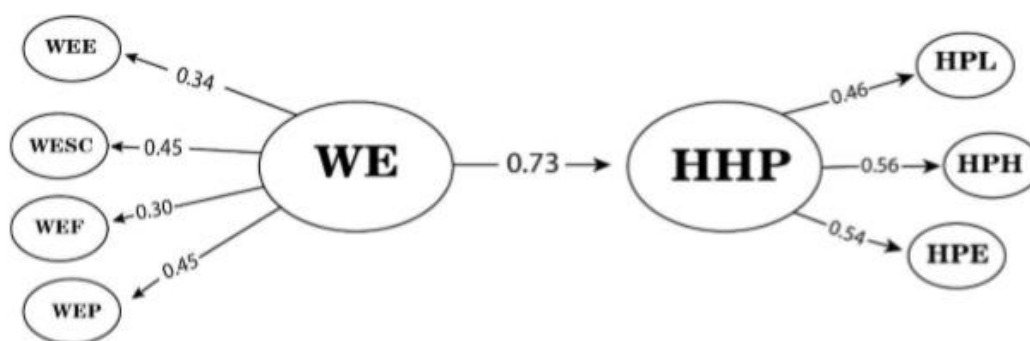

Figure 3: Path Estimates

Figure 3 shows that economic empowerment, socio-cultural empowerment, familial empowerment, psychological empowerment has path coefficient of 0.34, 0.45, 0.30 and 0.45 respectively that are significant at 1% level (p-value < 0.01). The path coefficients indicate that all these four dimensions are a key determinant of women empowerment. These results support the hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1d. Moreover, the standard of living, health, and education have path coefficients of 0.46, 0.56, and 0.54 respectively (all are significant at 1% level (p-value < 0.01). The path coefficients show that all three dimensions are key determinants of household poverty. These results support the hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c. The results confirm the positive and significant effect of women empowerment on household poverty reduction (β =0.73, p-value < 0.01). Hence the results also support the H3 hypothesis. The details of the hypothesis and related decision are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Harmonized Test of Hypotheses and their related decisions

Hypotheses	B	P-value	Result (Decision/ Conclusion)
H1: Economic Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon	0.34	0.000	Accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant statistical evidence to suggest that Economic Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon
H2: Socio-cultural Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon	0.45	0.000	Accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant statistical evidence to suggest that Socio-cultural Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon
H3: Familial Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon	0.30	0,000	Accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant statistical evidence to suggest that Familial Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon
H4: Psychological Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon	0.45	0.000	Accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant statistical evidence to suggest that Psychological Empowerment of women has a significant effect on poverty alleviation in Cameroon

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings is based on major inputs of quantitative analysis.

Over the past few years, the world is increasingly focusing on gender equality, women empowerment, and poverty reduction. These terms have been prominent in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which envisages a world where no one is left behind and everyone can live up to their full potential. The results show that the 4 dimensions (economic empowerment, familial empowerment, psychological empowerment, and socio-cultural empowerment) considered for measuring women empowerment variable determine the composite women empowerment variable (hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1d are supported). These results are in line with the study of Malhotra *et al.*, (2002) who identified these 4 dimensions to be the determinants of women empowerment. The findings suggest that the economic empowerment of women is crucial for the overall empowerment of women. Greater access to economic resources and control over income gives women greater independence (Pratto, 2016) and brings modification in the power balance of the families in such a way that women are more empowered and are considered equally responsible for the functioning of the households (Bacchus, 2005). Our results support the economic bargaining theory of family which suggests that an increase in the income of women (economic empowerment) improves their bargaining power and ensures greater empowerment for them within their families (Khan & Awan, 2011).

The findings also suggest that familial empowerment of women in Mezam Division is also an important component of women empowerment. Involvement in decision-making within the family, control over the matrimonial relationship and childbirth, and liberty from household violence improve women's social and economic position in society. The results suggest that freedom in physical movement (for acquiring education or for work) and lack of discrimination against females (socio-cultural empowerment) is essential for women empowerment. Women are empowered when they are encouraged to acquire education and work. Dasgupta (2003) points out that positive attitudinal changes towards women's role in the family are witnessed when women acquire better quality education and work at reputable positions. Education enables women to improve their socio-economic status and makes them more capable of protecting their rights. Lastly, the findings also suggest that psychological empowerment is another salient determinant of the empowerment of women. There is only sparse evidence in the empirical literature on the role of psychological empowerment as a key component of the overall empowerment of women. Brockner (1988) and Spreitzer (1995) show that self-esteem helps to promote women's empowerment at their workplace. Bandura (1977) also highlights that people having high self-esteem are expected to perform efficiently.

Our findings also show that the three dimensions (education, health, and the standard of living) used for measuring household poverty determine the composite household poverty variable (hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c are supported). These results are in line with the idea of poverty put forward by the World Bank (2001). The people living below the poverty line are not able to enjoy basic needs, like essential nourishment, a reasonable standard of living, basic health, and education (Janjua & Kamal, 2014).

A plethora of studies have highlighted the significance of education for overall household poverty reduction (Awan, Malik, Sarwar, & Waqas, 2011; Geda, De Jong, Mwabu, & Kimenyi, 2001). These studies suggest that education is an important determinant of poverty because it affects poverty in multiple ways. Firstly, education enhances an individual's productivity which helps him to find better employment opportunities, improves his earnings, and pulls him out of poverty (Barro, 1991; Janjua & Kamal, 2014; Mankiw, Romer, & Weil, 1992; Romer, 1990; Saravanakumar, 2020). Secondly, education, and especially better-quality education, contributes towards the development of the economy which, in turn, brings a lot of economic opportunities that raise the income of the households. Lastly, the impact of education on poverty works through several indirect channels (externalities) as well e.g. through the impact of education on the ability to make better decisions, reduced fertility, and infant mortality (Janjua & Kamal, 2014).

Another crucial determinant of household poverty is the health of the individuals who belong to a specific household. Poverty and poor health worldwide are inextricably linked. People who are deprived of good health are deemed poor. People who do not have access to health care services or do not have information or money to access health care services are not able to treat or prevent diseases. As a result, these people live in vulnerable conditions. Since good health is a prerequisite for increasing an individual's productivity, poor health reduces an individual's productivity and, in turn, his income (Bloom & Canning, 2003; Gounder & Xing, 2012). Therefore, as health is considered central to household wellbeing, health is an important component of household poverty.

Apart from health and education, and overall standard of living that an individual has is a key constituent of household poverty. Improving the living conditions of the people is what poverty reduction is all about. Raising the standards of living of households boosts the overall well-being of societies. Access to basic amenities of life allows individuals to thrive and societies to flourish.

Stressing upon the relationship between the empowerment of women and household poverty, our findings suggest that women empowerment positively contributes towards household poverty reduction. Empowerment of women can play a crucial role in reducing the stranglehold of multiple aspects of household poverty in Punjab, Pakistan. Women's

economic, familial, psychological, and socio-cultural empowerment helps to improve their and their families living standards, which, in turn, can contribute towards the development and prosperity of the economy. If women have more power, autonomy, and a voice in society they are in a position to provide a better standard of living to their families and drive them out of poverty. These results are in line with the ones presented by (Bharadwaj *et al.*, 2020); Bueno and Morefield (2017); Duncan *et al.*, (2010), Mohyuddin and Begum (2013), Morris (1990), Opoku-Ware (2014), Revenga and Shetty (2012) and Stier and Lewin (2002).

Our findings suggest that when considering household poverty and well-being, the role of women has irrefutable significance. A greater degree of self-reliance and economic agency within their families allows women to make significant monetary and non-monetary contributions to their families. Empowered women are better able to contribute towards the education, upbringing, health, and the overall standard of living of their families (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). Empowering women, giving them decision-making power, and allowing them free involvement can go a long way in reducing poverty and improving the overall standard of living at the family and community level. Our results suggest that empowerment of women can bring lasting changes for the women and these changes go hand and hand with improvements for everyone.

CONCLUSION
The present study examines the effect of various dimensions of women empowerment on multiple constituents of household poverty in Mezam Division, Cameroon. Using EFA and CFA the study develops composite measures for 'Women Empowerment' and 'Household Poverty' and then investigates the underlying relationship between the empowerment of women and household poverty using SEM. Our findings suggest that the empowerment of women can indeed help reduce household poverty in a lot of different ways. Moreover, the results also suggest that the effect of women empowerment is more intense on the education and health dimension of household poverty.

Considering the results of the study and acknowledging the significance of women empowerment in alleviating poverty and the development of the economy, there are some important policy recommendations. Since poverty is one of the greatest challenges that Cameroon is facing today, the need to change poor standards of living and inspiring women to contribute effectively to society through their active participation in the development process is the dire need of time. Therefore, in addition to targeting poverty directly, policies should be devised that eradicate poverty through the empowerment of women. Although the role of government and other institutions in empowering women is very vital, empowering women should not only be the concern of the government. Women themselves should be active agents in their empowerment process. Therefore, apart from the direct cash transfers, the policies that intend to provide basic vocational skills or training to women, and those that provide awareness to women on their rights should be the focus of the government of Cameroon. These help to empower women and as a result, reduce household poverty. In this regard, Women's centers (an initiative launched under the ministry of women affairs) established in Younde and Northern areas of Cameroon are providing free training on cutting, sewing, knitting, and embroidery to the marginalized women groups. There is, however, a need to introduce such programs on a large scale so that more women living in various areas of Cameroon can benefit from such initiatives. The focus of the policymakers should be to developing well-planned literacy and life-skills programs for women to increase their awareness about the core issues of life and sufficiently empower them so that they can contribute towards household poverty alleviation.

In this era of globalization, media and technology can also play a significant role in empowering women and reducing poverty. Media and technology can provide awareness on women's rights and focus on increasing public recognition of the potential of women empowerment for the development of a country. This will ensure that there are no gender-biased practices and society as a whole contributes towards the empowerment of women. Moreover, media and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can also help spread information about various employment opportunities and skill development programs offered for women. This will simultaneously empower women and help in poverty alleviation.

Therefore, for the eradication of poverty through women empowerment, a comprehensive strategy is required. Investing in human resources, developing infrastructure (for setting up women and centers training institutes), although important, are only some components of this strategy that should be supplemented with additional policies for women empowerment and household poverty alleviation.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The study, therefore, recommends the use of a comprehensive strategy for the eradication of poverty through women empowerment and the respect of the execution of the Cameroon Growth and Employment Strategic Paper. Investing in human resources, developing infrastructure (for setting up women and centers training institutes) and also, the respect of women rights.

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