

Family and Family Change in Iran

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Introduction and Overview

Iran is a Middle East country, which shares Islam as religion with other countries in the region. The majority of Iranian practice Shi't sect of Islam, which is different in some detail with Sunit sect, practiced in most of the Arab countries of the Middle East. From pre-Islamic era, Iran inherited the Persian culture and language.

The pre-Islamic religion in Iran was Zoroastrian, which was polytheistic religion. Formerly known as Perse, Iran emerged as one the strong and rich civilization. The Iranian socio-cultural system evolved through the interaction of Islam and the pre-Islamic Iranian civilization. During the spread of Islamic Empire, Iranian society made great contributions to eastern culture, literature, philosophy and science. However, going through several devastations, such as Mongol and Timurid invasions and destruction, Iran moved into the 20th century with an underdeveloped economy, weak central government, and strong internal interference from the European colonial powers.

The initial impact of Western culture started in Iran in the first half of the 19th century and developed to a full-scale westernization in the Iranian society in the 1970s (Banani, 1961; Menashri, 1992). The first half of the 20th century saw a sustained effort of modernization and westernization by government. Political centralization and exportation of oil facilitated some industrial development and modernization of the infrastructure (Abrahamian, 1982; Lapidus, 1988). Economic development and modernization was accompanied with growth of a strong modern army, secular educational system, and strong nationalistic ideology.

During the postwar II period, 1955-1979, Iran was characterized by rapid economic growth and modernization supported by government spending, fueled by oil exports (Bill, 1988). The structural changes in the economy were accompanied by social reforms such as effort to redistribute farming land

to provide a more favorable social milieu for economic development. Legal and symbolic changes were introduced to enhance the social status of women and increase their participation in the social and economic domains outside the household. These changes included granting women the right to vote and political participation, and placing women in high positions within the government bureaucracy. A new set of family laws was passed to improve the legal status of women within marriage and family. The legal and symbolic changes were geared not only toward promoting the status of women but also toward affecting patterns of family formation and levels of fertility and family growth.

Despite relative improvement in the well being of the urban population and especially those in certain regions, the process of modernization by Monarchy in Iran generated widening regional and ethnic polarization (Aghajanian, 1983). The massive economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s benefited the central and northern regions of Iran and deprived the population living in the marginal areas (Amirahmadi, 1987). While there was remarkable improvement in economic growth, the society faced a growing ethnic, regional, and class inequality in the 1970s. Along with the modernization efforts, the strong infiltration of Western culture and especially the components of Western culture, which were at odds with the Iranian Islamic traditions, created another dividing line among the population of all areas. Hence, cultural, religious, economic, and social discontent accumulated over the years and culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Islamic revolution was a turning point in the social and economic history of Iran. The revolution changed the fabric of the society and economy of Iran through policies for revitalization of Islamic values in all aspects of life. Legal changes introduced to implement these policies and cultural shift toward Islamic values were reinforced through mass media communication, especially television, and formal and informal educational programs. Unfortunately, eight years of war with Iraq, 1981-1988 (Chubin, 1988), drained a significant portion of social and economic resources, which could have been available for development of the infrastructure and provision of social programs after the revolution. In

recent years, there has been a new era of effort toward economic development and reconstruction after the destructive war. Serious efforts have been made by the Islamic government to improve the standard of living and provide the basic amenities to the rural communities and villages. A second economic development plan has been implemented and a strong program of basic health care and family planning has been established.

The existing institution of family in Iran has influences from pre-Islamic civilization, the long standing Islamic values and prescriptions, the 1960s and 1970s modernization efforts, the Islamic Revolution, eight years of destructive war, and the recent efforts toward economic development. In addition to the historical influences, the physical and ethnic diversity of Iran have always influenced the details of marriage ceremonies and family relations in local areas and among major ethnic communities. The inhabitants of Iran have neither ethnic nor linguistic unity, but over 99 percent are Moslems. There are a limited number of Jews and Armenians in Iran but they have never been a significant proportion of the population. The most important ethnic groups are the Persians, Turkish, Baluchi, Arabs, and Kurds. Except for Tehran, the Capital city, and some other major industrial centers, such as Isfahan, which have drawn a large number of migrants from various ethnic groups, the rest of the regions in the country are homogeneous in ethnicity and language. Three provinces in the Northwest contain Turkish communities. Two provinces in the west contain Kurdish community. In the southern part of Iran, three provinces on the Persian Gulf contain a mixture of Arabs and Persian. In the East, Baluchis live in the province of Baluchistan. Persians populate the Central Plateau of Iran.

In this chapter, I describe the components of family and family change focusing on patterns and changes as reflected in Civil Law, Islamic Prescription, and the statistics related to marriage and family. It is clear that the regional and ethnic variation in ceremonies and local folklore of family and marriage will not be discussed. However, most of the structural and functional aspects of family presented here are common across groups. For example, using household arrangement and residence most of the

families are nuclear. Table 1 shows the distribution of household by membership of different generations and relations to the household of the household as reported according to the 1991 short census. From these data 71 percent of households are composed of parents and children. These household plus another 8.5 percent that includes couples with no children are considered nuclear families. In rural areas 69 percent of the households are composed of parents and children. Adding this to the 8.5 percent of the rural households which include only household head and the spouse, suggest that 77.5 percent of the rural households are nuclear. Of course about 4 percent of the households includes head of household and children. While cross-tabulation data by sex of the head of household and the type of the household is not available, author's casual observation suggests that most of such households are female-headed households.

Other household type reported in Table 1 includes all households, which includes members other than children of the head and the spouse of the head. Some of these members might be non-blood related. These households can be considered extended household. Of all households 16.3 percent are classified in this category. In rural areas about 18 percent of the households are classified in this type of household. This higher percentage of extended households is consistent with the idea of modernization theory that extended household are more prevalent in rural areas (Goode, 1963). However, the difference between rural and urban areas is about 2.2 percentage points in favor of rural areas. It is plausible to assume that this difference has been greater in the past but due to the high rate rural urban migration since 1960s, the residential extended family in rural areas has declined. The rest of the households are other types, which might be considered extended.

It is clear that the data presented in Table 1 only reveals that rate of extended household participation only measured by co-residence of different generations. The data do not show the economic and social interactions and network of family members beyond the residential family unit. It is difficult in Iran to divide the households by the standard family types of nuclear, extended, and joint.

Households might be separate in terms of residential quarters and dwelling units, however, this does not prevent a large network of extended family members of various generations who share social and economic resources, responsibilities, and consider the affairs of the nuclear family as their business and related to them. For example, a business might be run and shared by a man and his sons who are married and have their own households; land can be cultivated by several nuclear families which economically make up a large family. In the social sphere, for example, the divorce of a woman is not just the shame and stigma to her father and brothers, but also to those of other family members of other generations living in other households. The kinship network, especially from the side of father, is important in the life of the individual even though the typical individual lives in a nuclear family (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

Residentially, like in many other societies, the practice is for the husband to remain in close association with his male relatives (father, paternal uncles, brothers). This patrilocal residence has been historically common among various communities and ethnic groups in Iran. Once married, the post-marital residence is one or more room in the same residential compound of the husband's father. It is possible that more than one son lives in the same residential compound with parents, with a few rooms allocated to each son's family. Usually, during the first months of marriage, meals are prepared and eaten together, but there will be a time that the new couple will be independent in terms of their meal preparation and eating. Yet, the complex of economic and social interactions continues. Unfortunately, measurement of such interactions is not reflected in census and surveys. If the new couple does not reside in the same compound where the husband's parents live, they will be in a dwelling unit in close proximity. There are some variation in terms of the distance to the husband's residence in large cities

and urban centers where housing has become a serious problem for the young generations. But the common pattern of residence is patrilocal.

The important relatives are from the father side. The rules of descent and authority are normatively and legally from the father's side. Primacy is given from fathers to sons and to male relatives. The person takes his/her surname from the father. The Law of the Registration of Vital Statistics states that: "The family name of the child shall be that of the father" (Pakzad, 1994). The common pattern of descent and authority among all ethnic groups and regions is patrilineal and is reinforced by civil law and Iranian tradition, with no variations. The Iranian legal and socio-cultural system is developed within a longstanding patriarchal social organization.

Sexuality, The Timing of Marriage, and Mate Selection

Sexuality

Sexuality in the Iranian society is controlled by a strong socio-cultural and religious belief system, which circumscribes sexual intercourse within marriage and treats sex out of marriage as taboo. Sex out of marriage, adultery, is considered a one of the great sins and is penalized harshly (Afkhani and Friedl, 1994). In some instances the punishment for adultery is death by stoning. The worst cases of adultery which are punishable by stoning are: (1) Adultery by a married man who is wedded to a permanent wife with whom he has had intercourse and may have intercourse when he so desires; (2) Adultery of a married woman with an adult man provided the woman is permanently married and has had intercourse with her husband and is able to do so again. While punishment for adultery is very harsh, the rules and regulations for proving it are very tight and requires trusted witnesses.

As much as the Iranian socio-cultural system and Islamic penal codes discourage and punish sexual intercourse out of marriage, they have strong support and encouragement for marriage and family formation. Traditionally, marriage occurs relatively early and is a near universal phenomenon for women.

Virginity of woman must be kept and proven until marriage. The dignity and fame of a girl and her family are at very high risk in case of having sex and loss of virginity before marriage. Within this context, the age of marriage and age of first sexual intercourse are highly correlated.

The timing of marriage

Early marriage for both men and women was a common practice in Iran (Moezi, 1967). According to the 19th century travelers to Iran, children were often betrothed when they were young, although the wedding did not take place for some years (Rice, 1923). In the past, children were occasionally betrothed in infancy and they would become couples when the female was about 14 and the male about 16 years of age (Piggot, 1874). Although such young marriages have not totally disappeared, legal and actual age of marriage has increased significantly compared to the historical description of child marriages. Both legal changes and social changes have influenced the increase in the age of marriage. A major development regarding the timing of marriage was secularization of the marital ceremony and civil registration of vital events. For many centuries marriage was basically a religious act and was recorded by a local religious trustee. In 1930, along with other changes introduced by the modernizing government of Reza Shah, the recording of vital events (birth, marriage, divorce, and death) became secular. Also age of marriage was brought into the domain of civil law and a minimum of age of marriage of 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys was prescribed by law which went into effect for the first time in 1935 (Momeni, 1972). Article 1041 of the Iranian Civil code, which went into effect in 1935, states “the marriage of females before reaching the full age of 15 and that of males before reaching the full age of 18 is forbidden. Nevertheless, in cases where proper reasons justify it, upon the proposal of the Public Prosecutor and by sanction of the courts exemption from age restriction can be accorded. But in any case exemption from age restriction cannot be granted to females below full age

of 13 and for males below the full age of 15.” The law stipulated that all individuals who are instrumental in arranging marriages below the legal minimum age might receive penalties if convicted.

Despite the legal changes in age of marriage introduced in 1930s, the actual age of marriage was still low in the middle of 20th century. As late as 1966, 47 percent of women in the age group 15-19 were married (Aghajanian, 1991). It is not clear as to what exact age these women were married, however, a study (Aghajanian, Gross, and Lewis, 1993) of a national sample of women born between 1927 through 1951, who were all at least once married by 1977, shows that more than 50 percent of the women were married by age 16 (see Table 2). Because the median age of marriage is 16 years, it is clear that for the large proportion of the 20th century about half of the Iranian women were probably married before age 15 despite the legal changes.

Table 2 about here

Some changes in actual age of marriage can be observed in 1970s as reflected in Table 2 showing the percent of ever married among the population 15-19 years of age. The percentage of ever-married women among women 15-19 declined from almost 47 percent in 1966 to 34 percent in 1976. After many centuries of a low age of marriage for women, there was a relative increase in age of marriage in 1970s. In addition, in 1970s the monarchy government was preparing a proposal for further increase in legal age of marriage for women to 18 years of age along with strong endorsement of women’s schooling and non-familial roles (Higgins, 1985).

Table 3 about here

The actual increase in age of marriage for women was very modest in 1980s. In fact, the percent of ever-married women among women 15-19 year of age decreased from 34.2 percent in

1976 to 33.5 percent in 1986. This was practically no change as compared to the change, which happened in the decade 1966-76 periods. Yet, in 1990s the increase in age of marriage has been remarkable. The data from the most recent census show that age of marriage for females has been sharply increasing. By 1996, the percentage of ever-married women among women 15-19 years old, decreased to 18 percent (Iran Statistical Center, 1997). This sharp decline in proportion married indicates the increase in age of marriage for female. From the 1996 census data, it seems that the social norm for female age of marriage is moving to after finishing high school education.

While there has never been any legal barrier for men to marry before age 20, the rate of such young marriages is small as shown by data from various Iranian censuses. In 1996, only 1.9 percent of the male population in the age group 15-19 were ever married (Iran Statistical Center, 1997). Even in years before the modernization of 1970s, only about six percent of men were reported married before age 20 years (Iran Statistical Center, 1995). It seems that as far back as the data are available, men have been marrying past age 20 and the proportion of those marrying below age 20 has been decreasing (see Table 3).

Mate Selection

Mate selection in Iran has been traditionally a familial and tribal action rather than a result of individual decision-making. Marriage by arrangement has been a norm and continues in today's Iranian society with modest variation from the past. Free-choice mate selection has been rare and is uncommon. It is the family and the family elders who decide for the prospective son or daughter who to marry. Traditional ideal choice has been marriage to first and second cousins. It has been common for a new born girl or boy to be betrothed for his or her cousin. In the past and particularly among rural and tribal populations of Iran, endogamy has had significance in terms of accumulation of power and wealth. The Islamic tradition has encouraged marriage of parallel or cross cousins. A number of ethnographic

studies, sample surveys, and census have reported the incidence of kin marriage among Iranian communities (Bradburd, 1984; Tapper, 1979). For example, based on the 1966 census, Behnam and Amani (1974) reported that the incidence of kin marriage ranged from 25.1 percent in Tehran, the capital city, to 32.8 percent in rural areas. A study (Given and Hirschman, 1994) based on 1977 Iran fertility survey data showed that among all women in this nationally representative sample, 40 percent were married to relatives. The survey did not provide detail classification of relatives. Rural women were more commonly married to relatives than urban women. Higher education for women and white-collar jobs for men were related to being married to non-relatives. Young age of marriage and marriage to a relative are highly correlated (Given and Hirschman, 1994). Interestingly, when women were divided based on marriage cohorts, the rate of kin marriage among recent cohorts was higher than the rate among older cohorts of women. This pattern is unexpected in the context of modernization and family change theory (Goode, 1963). Goode predicts that modernization will result in the desirability of marriage to relatives declining and exogamy increasing. This certainly did not happen in Iran. It is possible that, during periods of social change, there may be differences between short-term and long-term responses in cultural norms such as preferences for marriage to relatives.

More recent data are not yet available to examine these issues in the 1990s. However, we know that educational attainment of women and age of marriage has been increasing markedly in recent years (Aghajanian, 1985). Because previous studies show older age of marriage and higher education for women are negatively related to marrying a relative, it can be expected that mate selection has become more exogamous in Iran. The data collected in 1995 suggest that, compared to their parents, young men and women in school show much less desire for marrying a relative (Aghajanian, Tashakkori, and Mehryar, 1996).

Marriage in the Iranian society involves a serious matchmaking process. In many cases the initial go-between is the mother and the sisters of the prospective groom, who would search for the potential

bride at public, religious, or traditional gatherings, and public places. There is a good chance that the potential bride could be found among the cousins and second cousins or other relatives. There are also hired go-between, or matchmakers, usually a middle age woman, who provides assistance in making the arrangement. The matchmakers provide initial information to both families in terms of reputation, occupation, and wealth of each family. The next stage is the physical appearance. The modern technology of photography has facilitated this stage. The matchmaker is trusted with providing a picture of the groom to the prospective bride's family and a picture of the bride to the family of the prospective groom. The prospective marriage partners will have a chance to look at the pictures and return them. It is totally unacceptable by religious and social norm to keep the picture more than few days, especially the picture of a young woman.

After the initial stage of exchange of information and pictures, if both families are ready to negotiate the terms of marriage, there will be a meeting of elders from both sides, in the house of prospective bride. The elders include grandfathers and grandmothers, granduncles, father and mother. The groom would accompany his elders in this meeting. Tea will be served and the two groups of family elders will talk about different things. Each side will try to get more information, directly or indirectly, about the social and economic status of the opposite side and evaluate the extent to which the marriage will improve the social and economic standing and reputation of the family. During this visit, sometimes the prospective groom and bride are allowed to have a very short conversation with each other and have a chance to evaluate each other's physical appearance. In the majority of situations the prospective bride is covering herself with a veil over her full clothing. Note that in Iran, the veil does not cover face. The modern middle class families feel fewer restrictions by social and religious norms. In most cases among these families, the future bride is not covered with a veil and she is actually wearing clothing, which reveals her figure. Of course, if the prospective bride and grooms are cousin or other relative, they have had ample opportunity for evaluating the physical appearance of each other.

After the first visit, the families continue to get facts and information about each other's social and economic situations, as well as the reputation of the prospective marriage partners and their families. If both families are satisfied with the information gathered, groom's father will talk to him to see if he wants to continue with the process. They will make the case that this girl is appropriate based on the information they have gathered. In the end, what they really want from him is his approval of the physical appearance of the girl. If he finds her attractive and they are satisfied with the socioeconomic standing and reputation of her family, they will request a second visit for formal marriage negotiations. In response, the family of the girl will react in the same way. Based on the information her family has gathered, if they are happy about the socioeconomic standing of his family, they will ask their daughter's opinion about her approval of the young man as her future husband. The more the girl's family is convinced about the economic situation and reputation of the groom's family, the more they will try to convince their daughter for her approval. In the end, economic and social status and the reputation of the family of the prospective bride and groom, play an important role in the process of mate selection.

During the second visit, there will be a formal request from the elder of the groom for marriage of their son to the daughter of the family. A male elder representative, usually one of the grandparents or granduncles, would put the proposal to girl's family that "it is his family's honor to request that the two families join by marriage. The male elder of the girl's family, in response, would express that "it is an honor to have a son of your family as our son-in-law and he will be treated like our own son". After this ceremonial conversation, the negotiation starts on an important issue, and that is *Mahr*. This is the sum value of cash and jewelry which is payable to the bride (Moghadam, 1994). This is an important item in the agenda of a marital contract as it relates to the future status of the married woman.

The tradition of *Mahr* has grown out of the original Islamic custom of *Mahr-a-Sonah*, which prescribes the groom to provide the bride with an agreed amount of valued items, which can be in the

form of currency or gold. The original Islamic custom of *Mahr* strongly emphasized a small amount. However, in Iran, *Mahr* has been used as a safeguard against the unilateral divorce right of men, especially for capricious reasons. In case of divorce, the husband is required to pay the *Mahr* in full. It can be assumed that the larger the amount of *Mahr*, the more reluctant a man would be to initiate a unilateral divorce. If divorce occurs, the higher the amount of *Mahr*, the more economically protected the woman is. Divorced women who have small amount of *Mahr* will be economically dependent on their parents and brothers. There is no study, however, which examines the relationship between the size of the *Marh* and the probability of divorce.

In the process of negotiation for a higher amount of *Mahr*, the bride's family knows that the higher the amount of *Mahr*, the more the *Jahaziye* they should send with their daughter to the groom's house. *Jahaziye* is the household items including furniture, appliances and kitchen items, carpet and curtains, which will be delivered to the groom's house a few days before the wedding. While these items will eventually be used for practical purposes, they are the sign of prestige at the beginning of marriage. The more the items and the more expensive brand names, the higher the pride of the new bride and the more "show-off", the groom's family will have. If the groom's family considers the items low in quantity and quality, they will find a way to express this to the bride's family. Also this could be a source of reproaching for the new bride. The in-laws, especially the mother in-law and sister in-laws, will refer to the fact that she did not bring this item or the quality of that item was low. Because of this tradition and to take precaution against the verbal abuse toward their daughter, the bride's family takes a lot of time and planning for preparation of *Jahaz*. In fact, this tradition is so important for families that they start to prepare for the items that will go with their daughter to her husband's house long before she gets to the marrying age. In the past, providing *Jahaz* was a practical boost to the young couple that just started their married life and needed economic support. In contemporary Iranian society, this has become an important sign of prestige and pride. Given the high cost of modern appliances, families are

having a hard time providing for such items. In turn, this has become a source of stress for families and frustration of girls from families who cannot compete with emerging standards.

Once the negotiations for *Mahr* are finalized and the families agree on the principles of the contract and any pre-nuptial conditions, the religious ceremony will be performed and the representative from the Civil Registration Organization will record the marriage contract. The wedding, **which** is a big dinner party and marks the time they new couple will start their married life is usually between six to 12 months after the religious ceremony and the recording of the marriage. At this dinner party a large number of family members and friends will be invited and they bring gifts, usually household items.

As the families prepare for the wedding party, they will agree on a proper date and day, usually a Friday evening, which is considered holy, for the wedding. The night of the wedding, the groom's family will go to the bride's family to bring her to her new place of residence. Traditionally a few rooms in the house of the groom's parents would house the newly wed couple and they be part of the same household for sometime. There is now some variation in the pattern of residency of the young couple. The young couple might live on a separate level and have their own household in the same house where the groom's parents live. They might live on one side of the house separated by a courtyard. Or they might live in an apartment in the same neighborhood where the groom's parents live. Moving in with the bride's family is neither favorable nor acceptable. It is a stigma for a groom to move to his in-law's household or depend on them in any way. Neighbors and friends will also ridicule the bride family if their son-in-law lives with them

The opportunities for personal mate selection are very limited in the Iranian society. It is possible in some instances the prospective brides and grooms happen to get acquainted in public places such as parks, libraries, sport events, demonstrations, and meeting. Casual observation by social scientists in Iran suggests that the number of marriages based on personal mate selection has been increasing in recent year. However, there is no data as to what extent recent marriages have been through personal

mate selection. One can assume that given the strong gender segregation in the Iranian society, the opportunities for personal mate selection is very rare except for highly educated groups especially those who go to college. Even if the prospective mates meet first, they will ask their parents and families about the appropriateness of the person as a marriage partner before they take any further step. It is still the family who has the final say in who is the right marriage partner. Parental primacy in mate selection is strong among girls and boys (Aghajanian, Tashakkori, and Mehryar, 1996). Few of the adolescents want to leave parental influence out of their marriage selection. This is not surprising as in the end; the social contract of marriage in Iran is still among the families of the bride and groom. It is the larger network of family that is responsible for the outcome of marriage.

Temporary Marriage

Temporary marriage, *mut'a*, was apparently a matrilineal form of marriage, and one among several forms of marriage, practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia (Haeri, 1994). According to Haeri's research, temporary marriage has been legally permitted and religiously sanctioned in the Twelver Shi't, most of who live in Iran (Haeri, 1994). In its present form, temporary marriage is a form of contract in which a man (married or unmarried) and an unmarried (virgin, divorced, or widowed) agree, often privately and verbally, to marry each other for a limited period of time, varying anywhere from one hour to 99 years. The couple also agrees on a specific amount of bird price, to be given to the woman. At the end of the mutually agree period the couple part company without a divorce ceremony. After the dissolution of the marriage, no matter how short, the temporary wife must observe a period of sexual abstinence in order to prevent problems in identifying a potential child's legitimate father.

Temporary marriage as in contrast to permanent marriage is invisible. The temporary marriage contract is not recorded and it does not require any witnesses. Surveys and censuses in Iran do not ask questions regarding temporary marriage. Hence, how extensively temporary marriage has been

practiced in the past and to what extent it is being practiced now is not clear and any speculation would be misleading. Shahla haeri (1994) who has done ethnographic research on the institution of temporary marriage in Iran, reports that “the institution is alive and well among lower socioeconomic strata in the society. Women who contract temporary marriages tend to be primarily young divorced women from lower-class background, but middle-class women occasionally do so as well”.

Family Formation and Children

In the Iranian society, children are God’s blessing, they are inevitable, and they are a part of the grand scheme of things. Their presence is expected and normal; their absence has to be explained (Friedl, 1985). Religion and tradition have supported and sanctioned having children. Historically and from a religious point of view, more children meant more followers of Islam who can stand against the non-believers and conquer new territories for Islam. The Arab Moslems who conquered many pre-Islamic civilizations and spread Islam across the Persian Empire in 637 (Lapidus, 1988) spread this ideology. The spread of Islam needed military men and that was only possible through more population by early marriage and procreation.

Proverbs such as “couples without children are like trees without fruit. The only benefits of such trees are for use as firewood” or “It has to have branches to be a tree” (Friedl, 1985) are reflection of how the Iranian culture and tradition has been pronatalist. Children have been the center of family organization and cohesion within the extended family structure. It is a cultural expectation and a norm that at the proper time a person will get married and once married, the first child, preferably a son, is expected within a year after the marriage consummation. Ability to have children must be established soon after marriage, especially for women. Traditionally, son preferences have dictated the pattern of individual fertility. Women continue to have children as long as they do not have sons. Son preferences have contributed to the high level of fertility.

In the past, children have been perceived as valuable for their economic benefits in addition to their social and psychological significance. Children have been the main source of old age security across all classes and groups. Furthermore, children have been considered as a significant source of family labor in the family economy and as source of family income in wage earning jobs (Aghajanian, 1986b). In rural areas, both male and female children did productive activities --such as bringing water, collecting fuel wood, weeding farm, and taking care of household animals such as cows and sheep, carpet weaving-- and contribute to the production of the household. As they grow older children continued to contribute to their family through unpaid labor activities or their income through wage-earning jobs. Finally children took care of their elderly parents in the old age. Male children have traditionally been considered more economically beneficial as there is less restriction on their economic activities as young adults. On the other hand, the activities of female children become mostly limited to those within the household and inside the home as they become teenagers and they are expected by religious norms to be segregated from the male strangers. In addition, female children will leave parental house after marriage and they have very limited opportunity to provide any economic help to their parents.

In urban areas children have had less value in terms of their labor contribution in the younger ages but they have been considered valuable as they get older and participate in wage earning activities. They have contributed to their parental family through their earned wages and supported their parents during old age. Iranian parents reported strong economic and old age security values of children until as recent as 1980s(Aghajanian, 1988). It seems that these economic expectations have changed in recent years and parents, at least in urban areas, are more concerned about the cost of raising children. There is not new data to examine these changes.

Until recently the rates of infant and child mortality have been high in Iran. As late as 1976, about 10 to 20 percent of live births did not survive their first birthday (Aghajanian, 1993). Also child

mortality, which is the mortality before age five years, was high. For families, these high rates meant limited survival for children born alive. With the understanding of this limited survival, the family was encouraged to have more children to be able to secure the number they wanted.

Hence, social and economic values of children (especially sons) combined with high rates of infant and child mortality, supported a high level of fertility pattern in which women started childbearing early and continued to have children toward the end of their reproductive period. As late as 1966, on the average, a woman in Iran would have a total fertility rate of seven children (Aghajanian, 1991). During the 1970s, urban women reduced their desire for larger family sizes as child mortality started to decline and the social norms became more encouraging toward lower family size (Raftery, Lewis, and Aghajanian, 1995).

The availability of contraceptives gave some choice to women as to the necessity of children and the number of children. Since the 1970s, government subsidized contraceptives and information about them have penetrated into cities and villages. As results, for at least some groups, family size and number of children were no longer completely outside their choice. Some families used the opportunity of the availability of contraceptives and limited the number of children. These were mostly urban educated families living in large cities (Aghajanian, Agha, and Gross, 1996).

In the recent decade, child and infant mortality rates have continued to decline, especially in rural areas where the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has expanded the basic health services and provided better water facilities and other amenities. At the same time, the cost of raising a family has been drastically increasing. Children's education has become an important need for all classes of people. Parents admire education for their children regardless of gender. The changing agricultural society and fast rate of urbanization have decreased the economic and labor values of children. Also, a formal social security system is spreading across various classes, which is reducing the value of children as old age security.

From the government policy point of view, revolutionary changes and the war with Iraq, between Iran and Iraq provided support for high fertility and large family size in the first part of the 1980s. Since the war has ended and the Islamic Republic has entered to an era of post-war reconstruction and sustained development. Families are encouraged to have between two to three children. The government has a strong policy of support for families to decline the quantity of their children. The family planning program sponsored by the government has been supporting education about contraceptives and easy access to a variety of contraceptives to married women. Official policy is clear and strong in support of small family size for the purpose of improving the quality of life for parents and children.

Currently, there are clear indications that the focus of most families is more on the quality of children rather than on the quantity. High emphasis on education of children, the desire for high educational attainment for females, and the high cost of raising children, have convinced parents to have fewer children. Iranian women are not only marrying later but they are having fewer children once they get married. The new cohorts who marry have a longer interval between marriage and the birth of the first child. It is estimated that total fertility has declined from a high of 6.2 children per woman in 1986 to a low of 3.5 by 1993 (Fouladi, 1996). The future trend is toward a fewer number of children in a family.

Table 4 about here

The Status of Women and the Family

A large array of issues can be considered in relation to gender in the context of family. These include legal and property rights, inheritance distribution, material transactions, age of marriage, husband/wife age differentials, arranged marriages, polygyny, women's attire and segregation, and divorce rights. Gender issues can also relate to objective measures such as education and participation

of women in wage earning activities. Age of marriage, husband/wife age differential, and arranged marriages were discussed in the previous sections. In this section we explore the other aspects of the status of women within the family context and how it has been changing.

Property rights are not legally limited for Iranian women. Private property owned by men and women is equally sanctioned by the Islamic norms. Women can own property or business just as can men. In fact, transfer of part of the ownership of a dwelling property to the bride from the groom's side of ownership is a precondition to marriage in some areas such as Isfahan Province. Civil law has reinforced the equality of property rights of men and women. This does not mean that men and women own property equally. Like in many other societies, men own much more property than women as the source of acquiring property for women is limited. Women inherit a lower portion of property owned by their parents. Once moved to their husbands' house, women only own the property, which is agreed upon at the marriage contract. As a widow they receive a trivial share from their husbands' property unless the husband has transferred property to her name before his death (Pakzad, 1994).

One important channel for woman to be able to acquire property is earning income. Until recently a small percentage of women were involved in wage and salary earning activities and had less access to economic resource to acquire property. There are no data about trend of property ownership, but it is expected, as Iranian women have become a larger percent of the formal labor force in recent years and attain post-graduation education, they also have increased their share of ownership of property and business.

Polygyny or plural marriage of several women to one man has been allowed by Islamic tradition and the law based on Islamic code. At the same time, there have been strong restrictions on practice of polygyny due to the conditions prescribed by Islam. Given the religious conditions to be satisfied and the economic requirements, the best estimate is that the practice of polygyny was limited in the traditional Iranian society. In 1956 at the time of first census of Iran, about 10 out of 1000 married men

were married to two women (Momeni, 1975). This figure indicates a low rate of practicing polygyny in Iran at the time when traditional values and support were strong.

Even though the practice of polygyny was limited, the 1967 Family Protection Law sought to prevent polygyny by requiring the consent of the first wife (Bagley, 1971). This law was repealed in 1980 and allowed men to be married to more than one woman simultaneously. Yet, even with the religious support and with no legal restriction, there is no sign of a significant increase in polygyny in the Iranian society. According to the 1994 population sample survey, there were 8.5 men married to more than one woman in Iran for each 1000 married men (Iran Statistical Center, 1996). It is clear that the economic realities strongly limit the desire for a second wife. A stable rate of almost one percent of men in plural marriage can be observed based on the Iranian censuses since 1956. There is however, no data to examine the determinants and consequences or inter-generational influences of polygyny.

In most Islamic societies including Iran, a variety of dress codes exist for women. There is no unique pattern in these dress codes and it has varied according to the policies, attitudes, and interpretations of the ruling governments in these countries at various times. Throughout the history of Iran, the ruling dynasties with various level of dedication to the fundamentals of Islam, have behaved differently in implementing the Islamic codes of dress. The Iranian rural women have never been able to follow the restrict dress code and segregation as the nature of rural life and work was never compatible with such limitations. Urban women, on the other hand, have been consistently segregated and restricted with respect to the dress codes in public places (Higgins, 1985).

In the early 20th century, as part of modernization and westernization, the Pahlavi regime tried to change the dress code. In fact, Reza Shah used force to remove the dress codes, which was a long veil covering the women from head to toe. His forceful efforts were resisted harshly and he had to stop. His son, Mohamad Reza Shah, tried to change the dress code through encouragement and incentives for women who tried to participate in the formal education and labor force. As a result, efforts to

increase women's educational attainment and labor force participation was seen by the majority of Iranian families as religiously corruptive and unacceptable.

In Iran, divorce is a stigma for a woman and her extended family, especially the male members. A divorced woman will hear a lot of harsh sayings from her immediate and extended family members, relatives, and neighbors. As if divorce is always her fault, she is blamed for being insalubrious and intolerant. Traditionally, it has been distaste for divorced woman. The taboo of divorce is reinforced to a newly wed woman by the saying "... that once married; a good woman stays with her husband until her death and it is only death that separates them." The normative expectation is that once married, a woman should do whatever it takes to keep her marriage. The Islamic principles strongly advise against divorce and support it as the last alternative to couples. The Islamic judge acts upon divorce only when he is perfectly confident that the marriage cannot work and there is no room for reconciliation. Family elders will always interfere to bring the younger men and women back together and prevent a divorce in their family.

Despite familial, social, religious, and economic safeguards for prevention, divorce has always existed in Iran. The exiting statistics reveal that divorces are not as widespread and frequent as in Western countries, but it is gradually increasing. In 1995, 34738 divorces were registered in Iran (Iran Statistical Center, 1997). Based on this figure the estimated crude divorce rate is less than 1 divorce per 1000 population. The crude divorce rate in most Western countries is four to eight times the rate in Iran (Ingoldsby and Smith, 1995, p 193).

Divorce is more popular in urban areas. From the few studies (Aghajanian, 1986a; Aghajanian and Moghadas, 1998) some differentials in divorce can be observed. Divorce is more frequent at the two extremes education levels: women with no education and women with college education. Employed women are more probable to get divorce. The couples who do not have children are much more prone to divorce than those with children. That is, having no children or a small number

of children make it easier to divorce. In Iran, of course, infertility is an adequate cause for a woman to be divorced by her husband, but few childless divorce cases are due to infertility (Aghajanian, 1986a).

In the context of law in the pre-Islamic era, divorce was accepted and it could be affected either by mutual consent or if the wife was barren or guilty of a deadly sin/offence, such as submitting herself to another man (Encyclopedia Iranica, 1995). In the Islamic era, divorce has been the unilateral right of men but they are strongly advised against it. In the 20th century, there have been some modifications in the laws about divorce for improving the situation of women with respect to divorce. While a 1930s divorce law required the registration of divorces in the state registries, it continued to give absolute divorce power to men. In 1967, a legal act designed for family protection was introduced which prohibited men from exercising their former absolute right of divorcing a wife. The law sought to restrict divorces to cases of proven irreconcilability by the secular court.

Currently, the law allows those couples that have mutually agreed to divorce to go to an office of notary public (*Mahzar*) and register their divorce before two witnesses. To protect women against coercive consent to divorce, the law has been recently amended to give women the opportunity to bring their case to court if they disagree with divorce. The Special Civil Court (*Dadgahe Madanie Khas*) handles such divorces. The Islamic judge in the Special Civil Court is advised to do his best to convince the husband and wife to reconcile. Only after the judge has been unsuccessful in bringing about reconciliation will the court step in to investigate the case and make a decision concerning the divorce. The court will also consider cases which the woman has initiated a divorce request for reasons such as being in a physically abusive relationship with the husband. In such situations, the husband usually does not want to divorce his wife. It is only the court, which will be able to order him to act on divorce. In many such instances the abused wife will forfeit her *Mahr* as an incentive for the abusive husband to

divorce her. There is, however, not much known through systematic studies about the extent and level of domestic violence and wife abuse and its relation to divorce in the Iranian society.

After divorce the only economic resource a woman has is whatever she receives as part of her *Mahr*. Usually she may not be able to get all of her *Mahr* if her husband brings evidence of his inability to pay. He might agree to pay in installments and he may skip installments. It should be noted that after divorce, the woman is entitled by law to receive alimony for a period of three months and 10 days. She is expected to remain unmarried during this period so that if she is pregnant, the paternity of the child may be established. In general, the economic situation of a woman deteriorates and she will be economically dependent on her parents and relatives, after divorce (Nassehy, 1991; Aghajanian and Moghadas, 1998)

According to the law, after divorce, the father is responsible for his children and has the choice of custody of the children. Boys from age two and girls from age seven may legally be removed from their mother (Pakzad, 1994). Casual observation suggest that, in practice, it is most often the mother who takes care of the children. In fact, the mother usually pursues this because she can not tolerate the authority of a stepmother over her children. This arrangement may help the mother's economic situation, as the father will be responsible to pay for providing the living expenses of his children. From the point of view of the father, the living arrangement of children with their mother would be practical for his new marriage. It is much easier to get married and get along with a new wife if the children are not around.

Education is one of the most objective dimensions of the status of women in any society. For a family, resources to be spent on education are scarce in developing countries. Hence gender plays an important role in the allocation of resources for education. Traditionally, the Iranian families have allocated more of their resources for the education of male children (Aghajanian, 1994). After all, it is the son who will take care of parents in their old age and it is he who will stay with the family. The

daughter will marry and move on to another family. Whatever material and human capital she would have by the time of her marriage, will benefit her husband's family. In addition, daughters usually have to take household items (*Jahaz*) with them to their new household. This has always been a major cost of daughters for parents.

Educational data from the past reveal the pattern of gender based resource allocation for education. According to the 1976 census, the literacy rate among the male population was 59 percent, which is much higher than the rate of 35 percent for women (Iran Statistical Center, 1980). A better measure of gender inequality in educational resource allocation by families is school enrollment. Historically school enrollment of female children has been much lower than school enrollment of male children, even at the elementary level. In 1976, there was a difference of 21 percentage points between the enrollment rates of male and female children at the level of elementary school. This difference was 33 percentage points in rural areas where the cost of accessing education is more. At the high school level the differences between male and female enrollment was about 22 percentage points (Aghajanian, 1994).

Recent data show that education of female children is catching up with those of male children in the Islamic society of Iran. Casual observation by the author and systematic educational data show that parents are increasingly concerned with, and support the education of, their daughters as well as their sons. In 1994 the literacy rate among the female population 15 to 24 years of age was 90 percent. The rate for male literacy in the same age category was 96 percent (Iran Statistical Center, 1996). The enrollment rate of female children has increased at all levels of education especially those in age group 15 to 19. The school enrollment of females in this age group increased from 26 percent in 1976 to 48 percent in 1996 (Iran Statistical Center, 1997).

The primary roles of women in the Iranian family have been those of motherhood and wife. Female children have been socialized to domestic roles of home making and childbearing. Family

context has always provided support for the idea that women's primary role in society is domestic responsibilities. In general, this has been consistent with the teachings of Islam, which encourages woman to be good wives and raise generations of good Muslims. Yet, Islam does not prohibit non-household roles for women. A married woman may, without needing her husband's permission, be gainfully employed. However, if the nature of her occupation is not compatible with her family's interest or dignity, the husband may prevent his wife from engaging in such an occupation, provided he can prove such incompatibility in the Special Civil Tribunal (Pakzad, 1994).

Along with their familial roles, women have always contributed to the economic activity of the household, particularly in the rural areas of Iran. A number of family chores in the rural areas are essential economic activities. In addition, rural women contribute their labor to agricultural production mostly in terms of being unpaid family workers. Urban women may bring extra income to their families by weaving carpet or participation in home industries and trade (Moghadam, 1988). In most cases the income generated by these extra activities is spent for the family and is invested in various needs of the family, including preparation for the weddings of a daughter or son.

The women with domestically generated income may have slightly more access to economic resources than women without income. This does not necessarily mean they have more authority and power in various aspects of family decision-making. However, based on casual observation, one can suggest that women with domestically generated income are more prepared economically for old age. For many centuries women have worked on carpet looms while they also attended their household chores and child rearing. To some extent the money from this source has been used to supplement family income and provide the extras. Yet, in many cases, the extra income is secretly saved for old age. Saving for old age has been important for women. Due to husband/wife age differentials, women spend a large proportion of their adult lives in widowhood. Because their inheritance from their husbands is limited, women should prepare for widowhood especially if they do not have sons to take

care of them. There is dearth of knowledge about the economic situation of elderly in general and female elderly in particular in the current Iranian society.

The opportunities for women's participation in the formal economic sector has only emerged in the second half of the 20th Century. The expansion of industries, particularly those of textile and other assembly industries, and the opening up of governmental jobs in the 1960s and 1970s, increased the labor force participation of women in the formal wage and salary-earning sector of the Iranian economy. However, by 1976, the rate of labor force participation of women was 13 percent of the total population 10 years and older (Iran Statistical Center, 1980). In the same year, the share of women of the total paid labor force was about 10 percent. One interpretation of this low rate of economic participation is that the familial context was not as favorable toward women's formal labor force participation as was government's. That is, fathers and husbands were not as enthusiastic as government official about women working out of the house. In 1976, the average woman had about four children, had married before her 19th birthday, and had a few years of elementary education (Aghajanian, Gross, and Agha, 1996). Work out of house was incompatible with domestic roles.

It seems that slowly but consistently changes in roles of women are emerging and women are combining familial roles with economic roles. Women are delaying marriage and getting more education. Delay in marriage and more education are associated with non-household roles. Young men and women who are in high school strongly support non-familial roles for women. Among the adolescents studied (Aghajanian, Tashakkori, and Mehryar, 1996), 95 percent of girls and 65 percent of boys consider working out of household for married women as desirable and acceptable. In 1994, about one million married women were reported as employed (Iran Statistical Center 1996). As the economy expands there are more and more women who are interested in entering the formal labor force. According to social scientists in Iran, there are indications that the government is also supporting women's participation in the labor force as long as the Islamic values and norms are observed.

Stress on Family

Throughout the history of Iran, social crises and societal changes such as invasions, wars, revolutions, westernization, and modernizations have put an extra burden on the institution of the family. Some aspects of Iranian families have changed in response to these societal pressures for adjustment. But, in principle, the family as an institution has remained intact and continues to play a major role in the day-to-day activity of the society and in the lives of individuals. Despite the strong endurance as an institution, there are signs that the family has been under some stress during the last decades, at least among some classes of the population. Among these stressors are: the increase in the number of dual-earner families, ideological differences among family members based on generation and gender, eight years of war with Iraq, and most recently a harsh economy with high inflation.

Traditionally, women's role in the Iranian society has been limited to the familial roles of wife and motherhood. Women have been exclusively concerned with family activities and economic contributions within households and men have kept the dominant economic position of breadwinner. A growing deviation from this pattern of the division of labor has emerged since 1970s. Married women have been joining the labor force and participating in the formal economic sector of wage and salary earning. About half a million families have been affected by this new pattern (Weskope-Bock, 1985). Since then the number of working married women has been increasing.

In the recent decades this trend of labor force participation of women has been probably one of the important sources of stress on Iranian family in a society which is in many ways traditional, especially in relation to men's and women's roles inside the household. Employed married women expect a different pattern of division of labor within the household, which requires more of a man's involvement in housework and childcare. Yet, it is totally unacceptable within the context of the family network and society at large for a man to do housework, such as cleaning, washing, or changing dippers. Hence

husband and wives from dual-worker families are much more in conflict and may have more strain in their relationships. From limited available data, it is also clear that employed married women with professional jobs report more conflict and quarrel with their husband, than other groups of women (Aghajanian, 1988). Married women who work part time and those who do not have preschool children report less conflict. The best predictor of stress among these families is the amount of housework the husband does. The rate of reporting conflict is 50 percent less for employed women who report their husbands helps with the housework (Aghajanian, 1988). The speculation is that most quarrels and fights relate to the division of labor within the household. In many cases, although the husband is not against his wife working in the formal sector, but he does not want to contribute any labor to the household chores. There is yet need for serious studies of this issue in a society, which is swiftly changing in some ways, but some traditions such as gender-based roles in household are strongly persisting. In fact, with increasing education of women and improvement of opportunities for women to work out of the house, the stress on family will perpetuate, as the societal norms toward men's involvement in domestic chores remain unchanged.

Probably the least documented stress on the Iranian family is ideational differences based on generation and gender. General differences have emerged from the conflict between what older generation, parents and grandparents, consider western cultural invasion and young generations, adolescents and young adults, consider modernization and adoption of new values. These controversial cultural elements include such things as the style and fashion of dressing, music, films, and television shows. The availability of modern technology and expansion of mass media especially television programs through satellite technology has accelerated the diffusion of non-Iranian culture among young generations. My observation is that adoption of new ways of behavior and action based these non-Iranian cultural influence has been a great source of generational conflict within Iranian families in recent years. Interestingly, it seems that the adoption of technological elements of Western culture has been

very easy for older generation. Yet having the technology available has allowed the younger generation to access and borrow the popular Western cultural elements.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was a turning point in the history of Iran not only because of overthrowing one of the notorious regimes of the 20th century, but for its strong emphasis on revitalizing the Islamic values in a rapidly westernizing country. This revitalization of Islamic values began with circumscription of roles of women and their societal participation. Within this context religious and political leaders emphasized that restoring to domestic roles and raising generations of good Muslims best attained the dignity of women. Regulations were introduced governing the public appearance of women and their clothing. The segregation of women was enforced in public places, universities, and offices. Women were praised above all for being good mothers and wives.

It is obvious that the process of Islamic revitalization had a heavier demand on women than men. This differential demand on women for change or return to traditional ways has been the source of stress for middle class, educated urban families. It has been argued, convincingly, that such families involving urban, well-educated, professional Iranian women were not the norm at the time of Islamic revolution (Higgins, 1985; Hegland, 1990). Hence the revolutionary changes were not really new to the majority of women who were already following the traditional and religious values. However, one has to realize that the number of such middle class, urban educated families was large and it has been growing since then with the increasing level of education of women (Moghadam, 1988). Hence, it seems that this would be a continued source of stress on family.

Another source of stress on families in Iran in the recent decades has been the side effects of eight years of war between Iraq and Iran. On 22nd September 1980, the Iraqi army invaded Iran along a front of 1,352 kilometers, penetrating at certain points as deep as 80 kilometers into Iranian territory. In less than a few weeks, a large area in southwestern and western Iran came under Iraqi occupation. Five out of 24 provinces went under attack in a short period. In the end, more than 51 cities and 4000

villages were damaged and over 2.5 million population was forced to migrate to war-free zones and live in refugee camps. The war uprooted families from their communities where they had a long history of respect and recognition. In the process of moving out and being forced to live under a totally new situation with many strangers, men and women lost their networks of relatives and the social and economic exchange with the extended family. The refugee families were housed in camps and dorms where each family lived in one room or part of a big room shared with other families. The shelters were limited in such facilities as kitchens, bathing, and toilets. There was high physical and psychological density in these shelters. Privacy and personal space was practically non-existent.

The process of uprooting from villages and communities and refuging to large cities put a large number of war-migrant families in a state of social disorganization and status inconsistency. This was an important source of stress for these families. Some of the effect of stress is reflected in the increase in family break-ups and divorce. During the war, the divorce rate increased (Aghajanian, 1986) and for war-refugee families, the divorce rate was about 40 percent higher than the national rate (Aghajanian, 1990).

Death due to the war has been another important source of stress on family. There is no reliable measure on the number of young Iranian men killed in the Iran-Iraq war. The estimates range from 500,000 to one million. However, even the lowest estimate indicates a large number of parents who lost their sons, many of them below age 20. Also many women lost their husbands and became widows. For parents the adjustment to the death of a young son and in some instances two sons has been very difficult especially in the aftermath of cease-fire and the acceptance of the UN Resolution by Iran and Iraq.

Many of the war widows were young when their husband was killed in the war. It would be natural that these young women remarry as part of their adjustment for continuation of their lives. However, remarriage of divorced and widowed women in Iran is very difficult as virginity is an important factor in marriage and mate selection. It is not dignified for a man to marry a woman who

does not have virginity. It is my speculation that the young widows were not able to marry men marrying for the first time. On the other hand, men who were ready to marry them, wanted to marry them as second wives. Most of these young women preferred to stay unmarried than marrying as a second wife. In addition many of these young widows have children. The women and their children are partly supported by Foundation for War Martyr. While there is economic support from the foundation, single parenthood in Iran is very odd and difficult to adjust to even through there is a lot of organized social and economic support for widows of war martyrs. Yet, given the fact that there is no study on the consequences of war widowhood and the situation of children of war widows, the extent of stress among these families is not known.

The foremost stressor for Iranian families today is the economic pressure due to a high rate of inflation during the 1990s. The war and political division during the 1980s hurt the Iranian economy. Not only the economy did not grow during the 1980s, but also it experienced a significant decline (Amirahmadi, 1990). During the same period, average family size had increased, as social surrounding of the Islamic revolutionary society was pronatalist. Many high parity women, those with four or more children, gave birth to another child for the revolutionary society (Aghajanian, 1991). The decline in the family income in the face of a growing family size has led to a drastic reduction in the living standards of the average family. With the cease-fire, and economic restructuring, and devaluation of Iranian money, official reports of inflation are about 34 percent per year (Hoogland, 1995). However, laymen and economists in Iran speculate that the actual inflation rate is much higher.

The value of Iranian money has declined drastically during 1980s (Amirahamadi, 1990). On the other hand, the Iranian families depend on foreign exchange obtained from the sale of oil, for almost any thing from basic food staples to clothing and medical and health products. This situation has been intensified by the United States economic embargo on Iran and United Nations embargo on Iraq. The US economic embargo has limited the negotiating power of Iran in for getting the highest price for its oil.

This has reduced the total revenue of Iran from oil and as a result restriction on availability of foreign exchange for importing basic goods and raw material. The outcome of this has been growing retail prices and putting families under economic stress. It has been speculated that the outflow of goods and products from Iran to Iraq through black market has also influenced the prices and rate of inflation in Iran. While indications of economic stress on the Iranian family are obvious to casual observers and social scientists, there are yet no studies of systematic examination of the consequences and adjustments to this crisis. Anecdotal evidence such as stories about men who work three jobs to provide the minimum support for their families in large cities like Tehran, are mentioned by Iranian social scientists.

Elderly and the Family

While age is a biological phenomenon, the concept of elderly is social and varies by society. The categories of childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and old age are social definitions. There might be differences between the social definition and formal definition of elderly with respect to starting age. The Iranian census defines elderly as the population 65 years and older. Like many other developing countries, only a small portion of the population is old with this age definition. According to the 1996 census of population of Iran, 4.3 percent of the population in 1996 was classified as old with the definition of age 65 and over (Iran Statistical Center, 1997). In terms of numbers, there were 2.6 million people 65 and older in Iran.

In the context of family, the elderly have traditionally held special respect and authority. However, the authority could vary depending on prestige and power the elder male has through access to wealth and political power relations in the community. While female elders have respect of the younger generations, their limited access to material and community resources, limits their power and authority. Members of the immediate family, children's and grandchildren, and younger members of the family at large, are expected to respect the point of view of the elderly and be guided by their wisdom

and experience. In reality, the male elderly guides the affairs, which are in the economic domain and related to decisions for activities out of household. An example of this is considerations of opening of a new business by a young member of the household. Both religious teachings and social norms reinforce this relationship between the older and younger generations. On the other hands, affairs which are centered within the household such as decision regarding selection of a mate for a young member of the family is shared by male and female elderly. The respect for older generation is not limited to the elderly member of one's own family, but as a young person one is expected to have respect for all elderly in the extended family and the community at large.

The Iranian elderly have been supported economically and cared for within the context of family. In fact, in many situations, they hold the economic resources until their death to protect their status in the family. Islamic principles reinforce the cultural expectations for taking care of elderly members of the family and constantly remind that the duty of good Moslem is to make sure that the elders have a decent life. While the norms and sanctions for taking care of the elderly within the context of family have been strong, it is plausible to assume that the practice of this cultural pattern has been declining given the social and economic changes in the last three decades in Iran.

Some observations on the issue of family care giving to elderly and the deviations from the cultural pattern can be made from census and survey data. One important observation from the existing data is related to the sex ratio of the elderly in Iran (Iran Statistical Center, 1997). The sex ratio, defined as the number of males per hundred females, is 114, which suggests there are more male elderly than female elderly. The high sex ratio for elderly is observed consistently across the censuses in Iran. The implication of this is that females at one stage of life have a higher mortality. This might be due to the early childhood mortality and female mortality during the reproductive period. Note that current observed differences are due to sex differences in mortality many years ago. Sex differences in morality

should have declined in the current Iranian society. Also the war casualties of 1980 would shift the sex ratio of the elderly in future.

Another way to look at the situation of the elderly is to examine their living arrangements (Weeks, 1996). The distribution of living arrangement of the elderly is shown in Table 5. About 92 percent of the male elderly are heads of households. Most of these heads of households live with their wives. Note that despite the high sex ratio observed previously, two factors allow this situation for male elderly. First the husband-wife age differential is high in favor of men. Second it is very easy and common for widowed men to get married for a second time and marry a much younger woman.

Among women, only 33 percent lived with their spouse. Once widowed, remarriage of women is very rare. They either head their own household or join the household of a son. About 30 percent of the elderly women lived with their children who are heads of households. There is clear difference between male and female elderly in relation to living arrangements and dependency during old age. Women are mostly widow and live with their children, usually a son. Men are mostly married and are living with their wives.

Table 5 about here

The observed pattern of living arrangements indicates that elderly women will be more dependent economically than elderly men. Another indication of this differential dependency is that the majority of elderly men report employment. In fact, except for the men working in the formal sector of the economy where the law requires retirement at age 65, most men continue to be employed during their old age and work until they die. In 1991, 60 percent of the male elderly population was working (Iran Statistical Center, 1993). Among women, about three percent were working. The elderly women who were working were most probably among the needy and their work was based on the economic

need. On the other hand many men might have enough to retire but they do not want to lose their hold on economic power.

As fertility is declining in Iran and the rate of mortality in all ages is declining there is going to be increase in the percentage and the number of elderly in the Iranian population. There is, however, very limited data to examine the situation of the elderly in this transitional society.

The Future of Family

Family is the most influential institution in the life of individual in Iran. There is rarely any major decision-making and action of individual through life-course, which is not discussed and evaluated within the network of the extended family. Despite the huge amount of urbanization (Iran Statistical Center, 1997), which has influenced the residential aspect of the extended family, the social and economic interaction among extended family members has remained and will continue to remain. The patriarchal line of authority will continue to protect the fame and status of the family through guidance and decision making control of the younger generation.

The Islamic values, which have shaped the way of life in the Iranian society for many centuries, will continue to support the patriarchal family framework for family decision-making, and individual behavior and action. Sexual behavior will continue to be controlled within this framework and family and the state will discourage sexual intercourse out of marriage through strong punishments. Hence, marriage will continue to be a marked transitional stage in the life of the individual and the family will have primacy in mate selection. Yet age of marriage and as a result age at time of first sexual intercourse, is increasing for female. Women are marrying later and as the opportunity for education and work continues to expand, there will be increase in age of marriage for women. Later age of marriage for women and the opportunity to control pregnancy, is leading to lower number of children for the nuclear families (Fouladi, 1996). At the same time postponement of marriage and continuation of education for both

male and female will prolong residence with family of socialization and will result in increasing the household size.

With increase in age of marriage for women, husband wife age differentials will be reduced and this would reduce the period of time women live in widowhood. Shorter period of time in widowhood for women means better social and economic status of women in the old age as long as the great majority of women in Iran will continue to depend on their husband throughout their lifetime.

Islamic tradition and civil law allow women to have prenuptial conditions in their marriage contract regarding divorce. The law allows women to set conditions in her marriage contract, under which she is able to initiate divorce and get her divorce through court. As women become more aware of this opportunity and try to use it, this would lead to higher number of divorces for women who are in abusive marriage relationships. Higher education and formal employment of women are both correlated with divorce. Societal forces such as economic circumstance and expansion of urban life pattern will contribute to the favorable condition of divorce.

The accelerated increase in adoption of communication and mass media and technology—computers with access to Internet, television programs through satellite antennae-- has contributed to the acceptance of western ideals among the younger generations. There is no doubt that this movement of ideas and values will continue to increase in future, as it is practically impossible to prevent the penetration of information through modern and expanding technology. Adoption of western ideas in all aspects of life, by younger generations, will be a continued source of stress on family. This will also reinforce the existing gender based conflict, as young generation of women will be exposed to the gender egalitarian values from the Western culture.

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Table 1. Distribution of Households by Composition in Iran, 1991

<i>Household Composition</i>	<i>Iran</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
	%	%	%
Head and spouse	8.5	8.5	8.5
Head, spouse, children	71.1	72.3	68.9
Head and the children	4.1	3.6	4.8
Other compositions	16.3	15.6	17.8

Source: Iran Statistical Center, 1995.

Note: The census classification does not explain about other.

Table 2. Proportion of Women Married by age 15, 16, and 19 Among Various Cohorts of Women

<i>Married by age</i>	<i>Cohort of women</i>				
	1927-1931	1932-1936	1937-1941	1942-1946	1947-1951
	%	%	%	%	%
15	33.9	37.0	34.0	35.6	28.6
16	56.9	54.6	55.0	50.3	50.6
19	76.2	76.9	76.5	70.6	74.7

Source: Aghajanian, Gross, and Lewis, 1993.

Table 3. Percent of Ever-Married Among Population 15-19 in Iran, 1966-1996

<i>Year</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
	%	%
1966	45.5	5.6
1976	34.2	6.8
1986	33.5	6.6
1991	25.5	5.1
1994	22.4	2.2
1996	18.2	1.9

Source: Iran Statistical Center, 1968, 1980, 1988, 1993, and 1996, 1997.

Table 4. Family Size by Characteristics of Mother in Iran

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Family Size</i>
Age of Marriage	
19 years and less	4.9
20 - 24	4.3
25 and more	3.9
Education	
None	6.2
Some primary	3.1
Some secondary	2.0
Some college	1.8
Work Status	
Professional work	2.3
Sale and service workers	3.9
Others	5.4

Source: Aghajanian, Agha, and Gross, 1996.

Note: Family size is the average number of children ever born by women.

Table 5. Living Arrangement of Population 65 Years and Older by Sex

<i>Relation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
	%	%
Head	91.7	26.4
Spouse of head	0.0	33.4
Parent of Head	6.3	29.2
Other relative	1.4	8.4
Non-relative	0.2	0.9
Other	0.4	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Calculated by the author from 1992 Social and Economic Survey released by Iran Statistical Center.