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Gender Analysis of Marriage in Single Students of Isfahan Universities

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Abstract

Abstract

Gender is one of the influential factors in understanding a phenomenon and the ways of dealing with it. Analyzing individuals' mindsets and attitudes towards a phenomenon based on gender can be considered a form of gender analysis. One of the fundamental issues in society, with the transition from the traditional era, is the issue of marriage as a complex phenomenon with various analytical aspects. Studying this phenomenon from a gender perspective, which has significant effects in biological, psychological, and social dimensions, can provide a more accurate understanding of it and facilitate planning in this regard. This research study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with a sample of 30 single university students in state universities in Isfahan. The analysis of marriage, to understand the relationship between gender and students' mindset about this important personal and social phenomenon, was conducted using content analysis. The findings indicated that despite the reduced social pressure regarding gender divisions compared to the past and the understanding of students, both males and females, of marriage as a logical necessity for the future, there are still gender-oriented differences in terms of philosophy, conditions, barriers, and future of marriage. The study showed that boys mainly perceived marriage as a bilateral transaction with broad economic dimensions and social consequences which originate from the philosophy of commitment and dedication to the family. On the other hand, despite hesitation and differentiation, girls associated this issue with concepts of love, trust, equality, and the need for connection. The results of this research study can contribute to understanding marriage as a gendered issue; they are useful in policy-making in the field of marriage and family formation among young university students.

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Introduction

Based on the evidence which shows the general trend of decreasing marriage rate and increasing divorce rate in recent decades, marriage in today's era is subject to competition with modern alternatives (Askari Nodoushan et al., 2019). The literature in the field of marriage confirms the changes in attitudes and values related to marriage in the last few decades (Azimi Hashemi et al., 2014; Delkhamoush, 2016). The relative change in the attitudes towards marriage is caused by cultural-social factors, early experiences, the observation of incomplete patterns, and ambivalence in the desire to marry (Khojaste Mehr et al., 2016).

Research on Kenyan youth showed that the attitude of young people was different according to gender; young women were more pessimistic than men, especially about early marriage (Pike et al., 2018; Kithuka, 2020). Research on a sample of young people in Bandar Abbas showed that 90.2% of the participants had a positive attitude towards marriage and there was a significant difference between the attitudes and expectations of men and women concerning marriage (Fallahchai & Fallahi, 2019). This finding has been repeated in foreign samples (Đukičin et al., 2023; Kay, 2012; Servaty & Weber, 2011).

The mentality and behavior of people towards marriage are influenced by personal, family, and social experiences. Students who are exposed to family conflicts have a more negative attitude towards marriage. In addition, among both genders, the attitude of girls is more negative (Alqashan & Alkandari, 2010; Huang & Lin, 2014; Li, 2014). One of the important variables related to the issue of marriage, which is often challenged and debated, is the extent of gender differences. Investigating a sample of university students in Isfahan, the present research study mainly sought to find out what the relationship between gender differences and their mentality towards marriage is, the way the two groups of male and female students define marriage, and the conditions they emphasize.

Methodology

In this research study, a qualitative approach based on content analysis was used. Through using open, axial, and selective coding, the most important codes emphasized by the participants were extracted. The research participants were 30 students (i.e., 12 male and 18 female students in the age range of 19 to 33 years) in Isfahan State University in different majors and levels. Moreover, the sampling method in this study was purposive-theoretical. Data collection was done using a semi-structured in-depth interview technique. According to the emerging nature of theoretical sampling, the concepts and categories which emerged in the interview process were the basis of many questions. To examine the validity, an external evaluator was asked to check the obtained codes. In addition, three participants were interviewed again, and the codes were checked.

Results

In the coding process, which was done with an emphasis on the relationship between gender and students' mentality about marriage, 18 sub-categories, and four main categories were obtained (see Table 1).

Table 1. Main categories and sub-categories

Main categories	Sub-categories	Theme
Gender and philosophy of marriage	▪ Deep understanding of love ▪ Attracting social benefits ▪ Responding to social expectations ▪ Adherence and commitment ▪ Biological-psychological benefits	▪ Girls brought up romantic fantasies in the depiction of marriage more than boys. ▪ Girls believed that the formation of a relationship based on mutual love was accompanied by benefits from the husband and his family. However, boys considered marriage as a factor in receiving support from society and higher social acceptance. ▪ Girls stated that marriage reduced the social pressure on them. However, boys proposed that sexual and family affairs within the framework of social expectations increased the society's view of them more positively and increased acceptance. ▪ Girls considered the commitment in marriage, which was protected by the law. However, boys considered commitment as a kind of moral issue.
Gender and barriers to marriage	▪ Inequality and illegality of the marriage process ▪ Alternatives available in conflict with the lifelong nature of marriage ▪ Desecration of marriage ▪ Traumatic activism of family and governance ▪ The challenge of responsibility, rethinking, and modern individuality	▪ Most girls considered marriage laws in Iran in conflict with the goal of deep love. Boys referred to the inequality against men by considering dowry and alimony law. ▪ From most boys' viewpoints, alternative patterns that did not have the lifelong nature of marriage attracted people. However, the girls emphasized that these patterns were harmful. ▪ From the points of view of girls, the family and the government were not able to create the grounds for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills, and the boys noticed this shortcoming in terms of economic support.
Gender and marriage conditions	▪ Skills and knowledge ▪ Family-orientation ▪ Economic stability ▪ Health	▪ Girls mentioned self-awareness and self-knowledge in different psychological, emotional, and mental dimensions as one of the most important conditions for marriage. However, boys mainly spoke about the importance of family management skills and their complexities. ▪ Girls proposed family as a protective shield against the greedy views of some men towards the female sex and as a factor which increases respect. From boys' perspectives, the role of the family is highlighted in creating economic grounds for marriage and controlling customs and luxuries. ▪ From the viewpoints of girls, the economic issue is related to the lifelong security in providing expenses, but boys referred to it as the initial condition of marriage.
Gender and the future of marriage	▪ Fear and doubt ▪ The challenge of connecting past and future ▪ Experiencing new roles ▪ Changing positions	▪ The fear of combining career and family roles among girls, and the fear of economic issues and the differences between two families were among the statements of boys. ▪ Some girls were concerned about being labeled and forced to hide their prior experiences, and some boys were concerned about comparing their former partners with their spouses. ▪ Considering the future of marriage, girls looked for some kind of academic and career advancement. However, boys, due to economic responsibilities, observed a kind of stagnation and lack of progress.

Conclusion

One of the effective variables in the formation of people's understanding of marriage and its various dimensions is gender and gender differences. The results of the current research study were in line with this fundamental assumption and showed that, despite similarities, single boys and girls had differences of opinions in terms of philosophy, barriers, conditions, and the future of marriage. The students in this research study, both males and females, understood marriage as a logical necessity oriented toward the future considering structural backgrounds, and the estimation of their mental and psychological conditions. However, according to their gender, they had different requirements and conditions regarding this necessity. The results of this research study were in line with the results of some previous studies (e.g., Đukičin et al., 2023; Fallahchai & Fallahi, 2019; Servaty & Weber, 2011). One result of this study, which was also found in the literature on young people's attitude towards marriage (Kay, 212), was that despite the fundamental changes in marriage in the last fifty years, most young people were still mentally committed to the ideal of marriage. However, according to their gender, they considered certain obstacles and conditions regarding this issue.

Conflict of interest

No conflicts of interest are declared by the authors.

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