Decision-making patterns among Iranian family members

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Abstract: Participation in the decision-making process is a significant factor for recognizing the sustainable development. People of all ages and of both sexes shall feel the same attachment to contribute an effective sustainable development. Several factors have been proposed to realize the sustainable development in different countries. Family is mentioned to be a determining social institution which plays a vital role in social changes and development. This paper, thus, aims to examine the situation of the family in Iran and its evolutions over four decades. Family changes in the Iranian family have been gradual and continuous in recent decades . Accordingly, the development trends will be explained based on these changes.

Among the various aspects of family, the emphasis is put on the quality of the decision-making and its changes in the Iranian family. Traditionally, these were the husbands and fathers who enjoyed the authority to make the important decisions and other family members were bound to comply. Due to the political, economic and social changes over the past four decades and in result of the implementation of several development programs in Iran during the same period, it sounds to meaningfully change.

The present paper, then, addresses this main question that how the quality of the decision-making in Iranian families has changed over the past four decades. The answer to this question can demonstrate the quality of family member's participation especially women in the decision-making process and its ups and downs. Methodologically, it is a secondary analysis of the national survey datasets. The major dataset sources include The Future-study Survey (1974), the Cultural Trends and Social Attitudes of Iranians Survey (2004), and a range of other major national and minor various surveys conducted between over three decades to measure and indicate the mentioned changes.

The findings suggest that men still have the benefit of priority in decision-making in the family, however, it has been declining. Interestingly and unprecedentedly, it is nor replaced by women's power to decide, yet, it is the participation of all family members which is desired. The father's decision-making has been decreased from 72 percent (in 1974) to 33 percent (in 2004), as well as women's decision-making that has been lessened from 11 percent (in 1974) to 6 percent (in 2004). This emerging family decision-making process has caused a formula, the "collaborative decision-making", in recent surveys to be added, while there is no such option in the primitive similar surveys. Other national surveys also confirm this changing process. It recommends that the participatory approaches are being replaced the polar decision-making system in the family. Then, it seems the grounds for the sustainable development is provided more than any time before since now both sexes have the sense of participation in decision-making.

Keywords: collaborative decision-making, Iranian family, secondary analysis , social changes, sustainable development

Introduction

To endure, sustainable development must redress the comprehensive participation of all people, including women and the youths. The social capital of these two groups makes their developmental partaking inevitable. This has caused an increased attention to their role in recent developmental debates and restructured conceptual and theoretical grounds of development in a way that highlight their place (Elliot, 2013, 38). The central role of human forces in development has convinced researchers to give more weight to individual members of society and their involvement in fulfilling social demands. Development-oriented policies would not achieve the defined goals without appreciating the role of women and the youths (as elaborated by Agenda 21). This is an imperative especially in developing countries that need to articulate and improve sustainable development processes (Narayan, 2015, 404; Elliot, 2013).

In Iran, five development programs before the Islamic Revolution and five after it reinforce the necessity of evaluating the course of development and its human and social grounds. Compared with previous programs, recent development programs in Iran (especially forth and fifth) have envisioned a wider participatory scope for women and the youths. The population structure of Iran reveals the significant impact of these groups as determining human forces. The last national census in 2011 shows that women make 49.6 percent of the Iranian population while the age pyramid shows that 40.81 percent of the population are between 15-30 (Census 2011, Statistical Center of Iran).

On the other hand, family is a traditional, powerful social institution that is especially important in explaining social development and comprehending its alteration gives a better chance of understanding bigger social condition. The extent of women and the youths' participation in family decision-making processes presumably facilitates their involvement in similar public processes. Depending on which modes of socialization families apply, models of decision-making are shaped for other social situations; the authoritarian model of communication in families generates the passivity of subjects in other situations too. The main subject of this study is "the properties of decision-making in the Iranian family"; where such properties are considered an index of family authority system. The main question of the study is "what changes has the Iranian family witnessed in recent decades regarding its members' participation in decision-making?".

Theoretical Framework

Concepts and theories of development have widely changed in consistence with socio- economic developments of recent decades (Rogers et al., 2008). The "modernization theory" has dominated the theoretical models of economic development from late 1950s to the early 1970s. Based on this theory, underdeveloped countries can overcome their constraints by moderating their financial policies and following the path of developed countries. By adopting new technologies and through economic investment, these countries can follow the linear path of progress that developed countries have undergone before. "Development planning in practice was characterised by large infrastructure, industrial and agricultural modernisation projects, mobilising new technologies and was increasingly financed through international borrowing. There was little concern for the environmental impacts of these policies on behalf of governments keen to deliver economic growth or amongst international donors and banks" (Elliott, 2013, 28).

 The resumption of these policies in the long term fueled social inequality and reproduced gender gap (Braidotti et al., 1994, 1). As a result and along with policy action, development models are being reconsidered in order to achieve a homogeneous development that is inclusive of all social groups and their demands. Thereupon, by "sustainable development" researchers imply a stable developmental process in which, in addition to economic and financial factors, environment, human capital and inclusive participation by all groups is guaranteed (Otsuki, 2014).

 The recurring and multiple crises of recent decades that have affected all developed and developing countries, higher, middle, and lower classes, and individual women and men, have made it an imperative to consider the process of development in a more comprehensive sense. The environmental crisis is one of the most formidable crises the aversion of which is impossible without the consciousness of every single individual. The environment in which we live is out of personal or group control and affects all the same. Under the terms of sustainable pattern of development, the environmental costs proceed from mere climate debates to include socio- economic dimensions in international level; international crises with local and regional solutions (Redclift, 1987, 79).

Normative developmental policies can neither achieve comprehensive success without appreciating general participation of all countries, groups and individuals, and a proper calculation of regional human capital. Under such circumstances, the theoretical attempts must be capable of stimulating better explanations for current international crises, and social researchers must take on an influential role in mitigating national crises. It is not the case that global changes like climate change and the following crises are exclusive to groups of activists and volunteers. Rather, the very situation affects various social and economic patterns too (Benton and Redclift, 2003). "Contemporary inequity and distributional disparity pose a fundamental challenge to sustainable development. When sustainable development fails or ignores challenges based upon contemporary gender, race or ethnic disparities in income, health, housing, transportation and employment, these disparities will undermine successful development. Sustainability is difficult without repairing and restoring inherited and contemporary disparities which are inevitably reflected in ecosystems and environmental damage. The challenge of sustainable development is honest recognition of the historical roots of our current environment crisis as a critical leverage point for strategic change in how communities develop" (Collin and Collin, 2015, 209).

No theoretical pattern or conceptual implication can claim the required theoretical authenticity for explaining the current of affairs, without taking into account the global transitions and catastrophes that threaten the whole human

society. The coincidence between evolving crises and the attempts in "sustainable development" agenda has been there from the early 1970s, when the phrase "problematic world" was coined (Springett and Redclift, 2015, 3). Accordingly, among the strategies of sustainable development we see the empowerment of various groups like the indigenous, women, and the poor, in order to motivate their active participation in alleviating recent crises (Dalal-Clayton et al., 2002). Contemporary studies in this regard have also shifted to the qualified analysis of international crises, aiming at faster elimination and engagement of all individual humans from around the globe (Bruggink, 2011). The United Nations has also dealt with the issue of sustainable development in different regions through conferences and policies that track the participation and involvement of nations (Green and Chambers, 2006). The UN "World Conservation Strategy" was, for example, published in 1980 for preserving the environment and natural resources (WCS).

Considering the importance of general participation of all social groups, family is especially emphasized in the present study as one of the most important social institutions and the first source of socialization where most habits and emotions take shape and become internalized. As mentioned before, various development programs have taken place in Iran in the past decades, both before and after the Revolution, that depend for their success on the level of general participation, especially of two major social groups, i.e. women and the youths. The process of policy-making that address participation in decision-making and tangible involvement in shaping destinies also plays its part in easing trans-regional crises. Therefore, this study is an introduction to other surveys that call attention to the dynamics of individuals in their role as family members, both male and female and including all ages, and the empowerment of these individuals in the path to sustainable development goals. The theoretical patterns of this agenda have to be reviewed based on provisioning participation of individuals in all micro and macro levels.

Research Method

The method of this study is secondary analysis of data collected from national surveys during the recent decades. Regardless of the many surveys that have been conducted in the past years on patterns of Iranians' behavior and viewpoints, the findings of the present report is restricted to the national surveys that are related to individuals' participation in decision-making or the authority system of families, and include all citizens above 15 as their population. The first source of data is *The Cultural Orientations and Social Attitudes* by Ali Asadi. Parts of this survey that are utilized for analysis in the present study are devoted to the respondents' behavior and their attitudes towards family and its features. A decade later, another survey is made by Manuchehr Mohseni, *A Survey on Socio-cultural Attitudes in Iran* (1995). He was a colleague of Asadi in 1974 survey and used factors in his survey that can be compared with the findings of the former study. It has a part on the attitudes of Iranians toward family. After three decades in 2004, Mohsen Goudarzi carried the survey titled *The Cultural Orientations and Social Attitudes of the Whole Iranian Population* with the aim of studying social transition and development in Iran. Goudarzi, too, tried to present findings about factors that can be adapted to the findings of two previous surveys. The three are the main sources of analysis in the present study. Unfortunately and due to some shortcomings, no similar national survey was conducted in the current decade, and the absence highlights the importance of such surveys for understanding socio- cultural transition even more. It is worth pointing to the twin challenges the present study faced in finding its sources of analysis: a) the national surveys have been seized at times for reasons like being costly or for State surveillance, and therefore, there is not the possibility to cover all time spans in recent decades; and b) the detailed data is not available for all surveys, making statistical calculations and determining the significance of the relationship between variables restricted to the findings of some few surveys. Anyway, the least available data have been utilized to answer the question of the study more precisely.

Gradual Shifts in Patterns of Participation in Decision-making

Due to the male authority in Iranian families, women have had little say in household decision-making. According to Asadi, the agents of decision-making have respectively been: father, grandfather, grandmother, and mother. This has been the case for important and serious decision-making incidents while in minor cases, the hierarchy might have been interrupted. Overall, fathers made more than 70% of decisions. The prioritization of male family members -in position of fathers or grandfathers- demonstrates the hierarchy in decision-making patterns. Responses vary by gender; 79% of men have seen decision-making as the undertaking of fathers; whereas, women have rated the degree of fathers' decision-making as 65%. The difference shows that although the dominant pattern is paternalistic, men have more incentive to indicate their own gender as dominant in decision-making and therefore, rate their share of decision-making higher than the rate women give them (Asadi, 1977, 153).

In the following table, data related to the decision-making pattern in Iranian families in 1974 is presented based on of demographic variables:

Table 1. decision-making pattern in 1974

Variable Attitude	Gender		age			Education					urban	rural
	men	*women*	*15-29*	*30-49*	*50 and over*	*illiterate*	*primary*	*secondary*	*high school graduated*	*Advanced degree*		
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*
Father/Husband	79	65	70	76	72	84	75	63	54	55	62	80
Mother/wife	6	16	11	10	12	6	10	19	13	14	14	8
Adults	15	19	19	14	16	10	15	18	33	31	24	12
TOTAL	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Asadi, 1977, p. 156

Based on the data given above, men's share in decision-making increases with age. Men's dominance in decision-making decreases as the respondents become younger. Compared to other age groups, young respondents have given the least share of decision-making share to fathers. During 1970s and as a result of the increase in education and income levels, women's share in decision-making increased compared to men. The dominance of men decreased to 55% in opinion of the educated respondents, while in rural areas, fathers had much more power in vital decision-making situations than mothers. Due to the predominance of extended family pattern in some rural areas that entailed the cohabitation of grandfathers and grandmothers (or both) with nuclear family and their dominance over children, the share of grandparents is highly determining in these families and constitutes 17% of the whole.

The findings of *A Survey on Socio-cultural Attitudes* in Iran in 1995 manifest a gradual shift in the course of decision-making in Iranian families. Based on the data presented in this study, the power of men in families has decreased by half (from 72% to 38%) as compared to the previous decade. Rather than the female-dominated decision making pattern, the number has shifted toward the participatory pattern of decision-making. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents that gave women the upper hand in decision-making in 1974 has decreased (Mohseni, 2000, 97-9). Detailed description is presented in the table below that shows the condition of decision-making in families based on demographic variables:

Table 2. decision-making pattern in 1995

Variable Attitude	Gender		Age			Education					marital status	
	men	*women*	*15-29*	*30-49*	*50 and over*	*illiterate*	*primary*	*secondary*	*high school graduated*	*Advanced degree*	*single*	*married*
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*
Father/Husband	38	36	35	38	39	53	43	41	31	23	32	39
Mother/wife	4	9	7	5	12	11	8	8	6	4	9	5
Adults	20	16	22	15	14	10	14	14	21	25	34	13
Father-Mother /Husband-Wife Collaboration	38	39	36	42	35	26	35	37	42	48	25	43
TOTAL	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Mohseni, 2000, p. 121

Based on the data demonstrated above, the mentality of paternalistic authority in decision-making has sharply decreased among both males and females. With a slight difference from men, women show stronger tendency to the participatory pattern. Father's authority has dropped more dramatically among the youths than other age groups, but the middle-age group demonstrates the highest tendency to the participatory pattern. It seems that the middle-age group here is the youths of the two decades earlier who are still loyal to their participatory mentality. With the increase in education levels, the increase is observed in the tendency toward the participatory pattern. In addition, because of their commitment to a person of the other sex defined by certain rules, married people tend more to the participatory pattern. According to Mohseni, the relationship between two variables of education, and marital status,

and the variable of "Father-Mother/Husband-Wife Collaboration" is statistically significant and generalizable to the statistical population with 99% confidence.

The findings of *The Cultural Orientations and Social Attitudes of the Whole Iranian Population* in 2004 shows yet another shift in the decision-making place of men. However, the pattern has not shifted in favor of women or mothers, but towards a participatory one. In this year, 34% have pointed to the father, 6% to the mother, 43% to both parents, and 17% to the senior family members as the agents of decision-making in family (Goudarzi, 2008, 167-8).

The pattern presented in the table below, shows data on the decision-making processes in Iranian family in 2004, based on demographic variables:

Table 3. decision-making pattern in 2004

Variable / Attitude	gender		Age			education					activity status					marital status	
	men	women	15-29	30-49	50 and over	illiterate	primary	secondary	high school graduated	Advanced degree	housekeeper	student	unemployed	retired	employed	single	married
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Father/Husband	38	31	33	34	37	45	39	35	28	23	33	30	41	32	34	33	35
Mother/wife	4	9	6	6	9	8	7	5	7	6	8	6	7	6	5	10	5
Adults	19	15	20	13	17	13	14	16	20	22	11	24	21	21	18	25	12
Father-Mother /Husband-Wife Collaboration	39	45	41	47	37	34	40	44	45	49	48	40	31	41	43	32	48
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Goudarzi, 2008, p. 176

According to the data given above, men's responses vary from women's, regarding the state of authority in Iranian family. The authority that men attribute to their peers is higher than the mean (38%), compared to women whose rate of the opposite sex is lower than the mean (31%). The difference that exists in the reports from three decades earlier shows that men are satisfied with the current authority system because of their interests, while women are dissatisfied with it. Despite the moderation in the role of men that results from gradual changes, women are still dissatisfied with the male dominance in decision-making. The average youths who had the least tendency to the male authority in decision-making, have preserved this attitude in the course of three decades and by entering the middle-age or the elderly groups, and this has caused the tendency in the middle-age and elderly age groups to shift from the father to the participatory pattern of decision-making. This has also made the gap between age groups shrinking, although the young age group is still the least interested in the male authority in decision-making and the elderly are the most in favor of preserving the traditional patterns. The comparison of the youths' attitudes in 2004 and the past decade shows that the participatory pattern is being replaced by the authoritarian pattern. As the education increases, the place of fathers in decision-making drops sharply. Of interest, however, is the 39% decrease in the decision-making place of fathers in the attitude of the uneducated in three decades (from 84% to 45%). As a result, it could be stated that although the traditional decision-making patterns are outmoded for the educated, the general course of decision-making patterns is changing among the whole population. Regarding occupation, housekeepers that mainly consist of women in Iran, show the highest tendency to the participatory pattern. Housewives' expectation for an increased share of decision-making shows the greatest demand for participatory patterns among marginalized women. In spite of attributing higher decision-making priority to men by a considerable proportion of housewives, the group shows the highest demand for change, too. Married people who have undergone certain duties before someone of the opposite sex have also demonstrated more tendencies to participatory patterns than singles. The reason might be that single individuals, who are still dependent on their parental families, feel the tendency to participatory patterns after facing changes in their situation, assuming responsibilities, and making relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

In the following table, the data on the parameter "The main decision-making members of the Iranian family" is shown in three periods:

Table 4. decision-making patterns in three period

Time Attitude	1974 %	1995 %	2004 %
Father/Husband	72	38	34
Mother/Wife	11	7	6
Adults	17	17	17
Father-Mother /Husband-Wife Collaboration	Not asked	38	43
TOTAL	**100**	**100**	**100**

Based on multiple data sources: Asadi, 1977; Mohseni,2000; Goudarzi, 2008

The comparison of the findings of 1974, 1995 and 2004 surveys shows that in three decades, the role of fathers in family decision-making processes has sharply decreased (from 72% to 38% and from 38% to 34%). The place of women in decision-making has also decreased (from 11% to 7% and from 7% to 6%) with less severity. A main finding of the comparison of the collected data is the formation of the concept "participatory decision-making" pattern (between women and men) in the data related to the period after the Revolution; this is while there has been no such alternative among responses, back in 1974. The fading role of women and men in decision-making processes in the Iranian post-Revolution family indicates the decreasing polemic authority system and its gradual replacement with collective, participatory patterns. In a matter of decades, male authority in decision-making has sharply decreased and their dominance (as fathers or husbands) has dropped, leading to the increase in the participatory role of both sexes.

Conclusion

Recent international developments have convinced researchers to reconsider development theories based on human dynamics and human capital. These changes, for example, the environmental and climate changes, affect all people around the globe equally. Social groups must have their active part in controlling crises based on their social dynamics. Any sustainable development to preserve depends on taking local dynamics into account when dealing with regional and global demands. Understanding the context of sustainable development in a developing country like Iran is highly crucial. Considering the five development programs before, and five after the Revolution in Iran, the precise understanding of the contextual circumstances of development there is quite important. Also, the population structure in Iran makes women and the youths two significant groups that constitute about half the human capital in the country. In the present study, the quality of decision-making in the Iranian family was studied with emphasis on the role of individual family members. Having the importance of family and its role in socialization process in mind, the participation pattern of family members, especially women and the youths, is an index for their general participation in society and in tangible national sustainable development. Family in this sense is the carrier for reaching development goals and preparing subjects for undertaking their social commitments. The method for responding the main question of the study is secondary analysis of data collected from national surveys that have been carried out in recent decades. The sources of this analysis are three national surveys made in the past few decades that are comparable having examined almost identical factors of family behavior and attitudes. Comparison of the data, taken from these surveys, demonstrates the emergence of changes in the condition of decision-making patterns and attitudes among Iranian family members. Authority of fathers as the main decision-making agents in families has dropped sharply (from 72% to 34%) after the revolution. Of interest is the parallel decrease (from 11% to 6%) in the authority of mothers and women as main family decision-makers and the emergence of participatory pattern of male and female family members, instead. Comparison of the data shows that polarized authority patterns have given way to multiple non-polarized situations and the groundings are prepared for the general participation of people in key decision-making occasions. Comparison shows the absence of participatory pattern of decision-making in surveys that are carried before the Revolution and the very emergence in the post-Revolution era.

Women and the youths are two of the main groups witnessing change. It seems that the increase in the education level in these groups is one of the determining variables behind the change. Based on statistical reports from the mentioned surveys, there is a direct, significant relationship between education and the participatory decision-making pattern. The ambiguity noticed in women and the youths because of lacking a comprehensive pattern in mind, gradually disappears. The young age group demonstrates an apparent tendency to participatory patterns in a matter of few decades and women show such a tendency more forcefully than men. Both women and men demonstrate gender superiority attitudes when evaluating family decision-making realities. This attitude is indicative

of a sort of gender authoritarian bias among women and men. However, the general course of changes leans to the disappearance of any authoritarian views. The present study examined the grounds for achieving sustainable development with focus on individual decision-making behavior in family as one of the most important social institutions in Iran that underwent changes in recent decades.

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