

Sociological Study of the Suburban-life Pattern and its Impact on Sustainable Development and Health of Kurdistan, Iran

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Abstract: The rapid growth of urbanization without the accompanying growth and development of economic and social indicators as a prerequisite for sustainable urbanization has hit the cities with many problems and crises. One of these problems is suburbanization. Suburbanization has devastating effects on sustainable urban development in terms of environmental health, mental health, social health, urban sustainability, etc. The suburbs, with features such as poor quality of life, poor housing conditions, high population density, urban problems, and suburban people, with characteristics such as low levels of literacy, unemployment, insecure jobs, and etc. have created an environment conducive to growth and the emergence of various kinds of social harm such as addiction, theft, spree, sale and consumption of drugs, sale and consumption of alcohol, prostitution, etc., where this would be a serious threat to sustainable urban development and growth. This study is a survey which uses a researcher-made questionnaire and researcher's experience about the suburbs of the cities of Saqez and Sanandaj to examine the suburbanization problem as a serious threat to sustainable urban development. Sample size includes 523 suburban inhabitants of Saqez and 376 inhabitants of the Sanandaj suburbs. Findings of the research show that about 63 percent of respondents were not happy with their neighborhood health or had low satisfaction. The suburban households had, on average, two rooms in terms of housing quantity. About 43 percent of them have evaluated their financial and economic status as bad and weak in terms of the spread of poverty neighborhoods.

Keywords: suburbanization, urban health, urban sustainability development

Introduction and statement of the problem

After the rapid process of urbanization and the emergence of a dominant urbanization pattern in Iran, suburban areas or informal settlements now account for a significant part of the urban and residential areas, which, according to official statistics, these areas are home to about one third of the population. From the early decades of this century and the domination of the urbanism development pattern in Iran, which has been based on the modernization paradigm, such issues as the arrival of industries, numerous social reforms, and land reform in rural society, the injection of oil revenues into cities, reduced mortality and later, the revolution and the war with Iraq, along with other factors, have led a large part of the population and the rural labor force to migrate to the cities. So that now we can say that in Iran there are about 11 million suburb-dwelling people. An important part of suburbanization in Iran belongs to prosperous poles like Tehran, Mashhad, Karaj, Ahvaz, Bandar Abbas and Isfahan.

Of course, this is not a third world-specific phenomenon as we witness it in industrial cities and advanced countries in the developed world also. Suburbanization in a city like Calcutta has become a normal phenomenon, and Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Manila, Caracas, Cairo, Karachi and Delhi are examples of these cities. (Naghdi, 2010). Emphasis by the UN on organizing suburbanization in the *Millennium Goals* is indicative of suburbanization as a global issue. Of main phenomena of urban instability, especially in developing countries, there is a form of urbanization with acute problems, known as informal settlements, which is increasingly evolving around the world. According to available statistics, about 1.6 percent of the world population and 50 percent of the urban population of developing countries live in suburban areas without adequate urban amenities (Bayat and Seljuk, 2005).

Because of the importance of suburbanization, the United Nations' Human Settlements Program has been providing databases on urban settlements since 1991, and, in 1997, it launched a global urban monitoring plan to identify the world's most important urban issues, with a strong focus on the *Millennium Goals*, which the provision of adequate shelter for the suburban people is considered the main goal of it (Martinez, 2008).

Usually residential areas of suburban areas are non-standard and are very dense, unsafe, unstable, and inadequate from a social point of view, being itself a cause of crime, which is related to the Theory of Broken Windows.

The study of the suburbanization trend shows that this phenomenon is becoming more and more critical, as according to studies, about 50 percent of the population of Sanandaj live in suburban areas that occupy only 16 percent of the city's area. In Mashhad, with 3.2 million people, suburban people account for about 30 percent of the total population (Hatami-Nejad, 2003). The suburban population in Saghez accounts for about 66 percent of the city's population. This phenomenon will bring with itself devastating consequences. This is to the extent that the Fifth Development Plan has explicitly referred to it in the macro policies communicated to entities in Iran. In suburban areas, there are problems such as tight and irregular alleys, houses with a unsafe and low area, a high density of population, lack of economic and social amenities and so on. Informal settlement is considered as a threat to the sustainability and cohesion of the urban community and sustainable development, due to the existence of poverty and its spreading, and the endangering of the environment and imposition of costs to solve problems, thus requiring special decisions to regulate its situation and prevent more spread in the future.

Theoretical Framework of Research

Suburbanization, like every other urban social phenomenon, has been considered and analyzed from different angles. Based on the theory of "Deprivation Trap", Chambers mentions five unfavorable clusters that are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and are tied together like chains to the hands and feet or the poor.

1. Poverty (With indicators such as lack of assets, shelters made of wood, clay, mattresses, simple cooking utensils, unhealthy toilets, borrowing from neighbors, tattered clothing, high hours of work, especially for women with low efficiency, children's work, and a hard-to-survive life).
2. Physical weakness (Physically thin members, family members being sick due to malnutrition and parasitic diseases, poor babies, etc.).
3. Household isolation (The alienation of the household relative to the outside world, unawareness of events due to illiteracy, limited travel).
4. Deprivation and vulnerability (Insignificant food supply, insignificance of household cash and vulnerability to diseases), and
5. Powerlessness of the household (Lack of knowledge about the law, lack of legal awareness, lack of bargaining power (Azkia and Ghaffari, 2006, 78 – 82).

Harrington also remarks that poverty in the United States has become a culture, institution, and lifestyle, and the American poor are caught in a "Hellish circle." Disadvantaged people become sick more than other people in the community, because they live in dirty places while living under unsafe conditions, and that they do not have enough food and medical care. When they become ill, their illness lasts longer than people of other social groups, and hence they fall ill. And their illness is long, so they lose their job and can hardly find retirement jobs, and thus they are not able to afford adequate housing and doctors (Harrington, 22-23). Clinard considers suburbanization as a lifestyle, stating that it is a subculture occurring with a set of values and norms in low-health areas, and areas with social deviances and other characteristics that result in social isolation and rejection (ZahedZahedani, 1987, 9-10).

Philip Hauser considers rapid urbanization as engendering exacerbate social and personal frictions and impeding the smooth integration of rural immigrants with urban culture; immigrants who do not have a fate unless to flood suburban areas (SeddiqSarvestani, 1997).

From the Chicago's School perspective, immigration, spatial and social mobility, increases alienation in the urban community and weakens social monitoring. Therefore, it is more likely that it engenders crime and crime model, and paves the way for it (Park, 1967). This view refers the desire for social deviations to the lower classes of society living in the suburban and impoverished neighborhoods of large cities (Ahmadi, 1999: 4).

In their work "Polish peasants in Europe and the United States", Thomas and Zenaniski showed that in the first stage, the migration of first-generation people is severely impacted by the loss of their moral roots and social support, and maintain that they suffer from personality instability. They turn to alcoholism and eventually fall into poverty, while in the second phase, the second generation comes to the scene as the effects of moral instability are lost, and young groups begin forming active subcultures. (Fukuhi, 2006: 181 – 182).

Research Methodology

This study was conducted using a researcher-made questionnaire and researcher's experience on suburban areas of Saghez and Sanandaj. Sample size of this study included 523 suburban inhabitants of Saghez and 374 suburban inhabitants of Sanandaj. To select respondents for interviewing, cluster sampling method as well as other relevant research data were applied, and in the meantime, documents and books were also used.

Destructive Consequences of Suburbanization for Urban Health and Sustainable Development

Homelessness and bad-housing, the spread of social deviations, environmental pollution, traffic problems, poor access to safe and drinking water, the problem of waste disposal and recycling, the spread of psychological and personality trauma, the problem of fair distribution of facilities and services needed by the citizens and, finally, the problem of job and income are among the problems that affect all citizens, but these issues are more prominent in suburban areas. In fact, economic problems, the existence of poverty and the culture of poverty, the lack of the spirit of citizenship, the lack of participation, the feeling of discrimination, deferred prosperity, the destruction of public property, etc., are among the most important issues of suburban areas that eliminate the health of suburban people. In the following, we deal with some of them.

- **The Health Status of Suburban Neighborhoods and the Spread of Infectious and Contagious Diseases**
Mortality rates, particularly for children and mothers are high in suburban areas, so that the mortality of children under five in these areas is five times higher than that in non-suburban areas (Martinez et al., 2003). The researcher's findings on satisfaction with the situation among the suburban people in Saghez also confirms that, so that about 30 percent of the respondents were reported to not satisfied with the health of their neighborhood at all, 30.3 percent had a low level of satisfaction, 33.8 percent had a modest level, while only 6 percent were very satisfied with their health status.

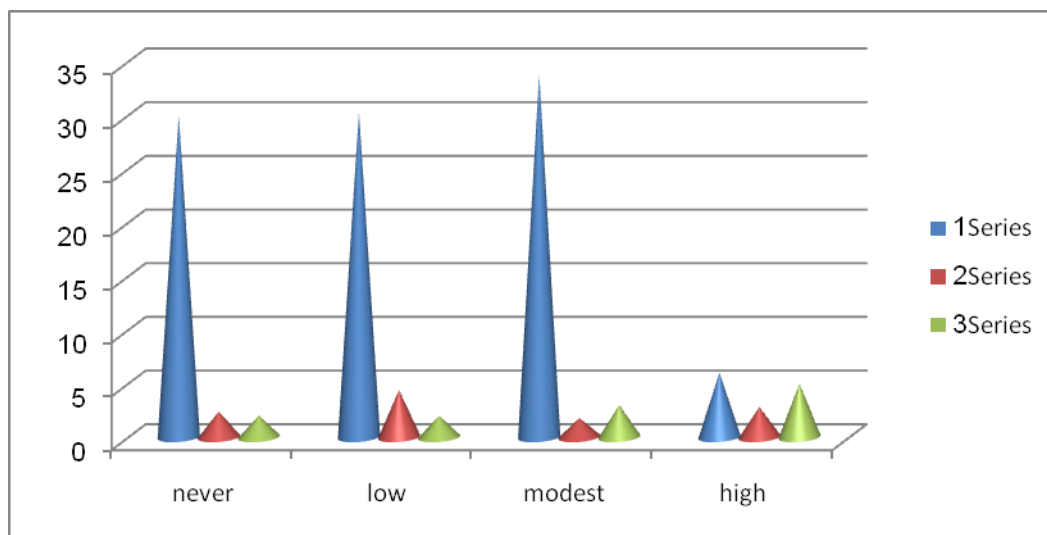


Diagram (1): The degree of satisfaction with the health status of the neighborhood

- **Inappropriate Housing As A Threat for the Lives of Suburban Residents**

Shelter is a basic human need, and housing is a serious problem for the most deprived people. In suburban areas, a significant number of poor people live, and for all of them housing is a real and necessary priority. For this reason, newcomers often choose the cheapest places to build a house in, such as places adjacent to traffic jams, next to flood lines and under high pressure electricity cables, or areas lacking sanitation or health. Another problem with the housing of the suburban population is the amount of housing available to households, which, if accompanied by the quality of housing, adds to the importance of housing problems. For example, in the suburbs of the city of Saghez, the number of rooms in the households surveyed fluctuated between 1 and 7 at the most and on average, families in such areas had 2 rooms. Given the

standard deviation, it can be said that 68 percent of the households under study had a population of 3 to 8 people living in their residential units. Hence, the shortage of space and high population density in residential units is one of the most prominent features of these areas that can have adverse consequences for the health of its inhabitants.

- **Job Instability and the Lives of Suburban People**

The rapid increase in urban populations causes significant changes in the age-old and sexual composition of the population and brings cities to the brink of the problem, in the sense that the influx of rural youth to cities has led to a rapid increase in urban populations from a youth's age group point of view, thereby, resulting in chaos for this age group in comparison with other groups (Naghdi, 2003: 130). Most suburban people have service and construction jobs such as being worker, simple laborer, scavenging and vendors, or people with false and non-productive businesses such as selling coupons and cigarettes in squares and crossings, retail-selling, dealerships, etc. Here, other well-known businesses include putting up grocery stores alongside homes (Samawati, 1993). A researcher's survey of the variables of the job type of Saqhez suburban areas shows that 23.81 percent of suburban people were workers, 15.8 percent were vendors, 7.3 percent were shop owners and a 4.4 percent were drivers .

Table (2) Occupation type in Sanandaj among the suburban areas

Type of occupation	frequency	Percentage
Vendor	57	15.8
Laboring	94	23.81
Selling dried bread	9	2.7
Construction	4	1.2
Mechanics	1	0.3
Farming	10	2.8
Driving	16	4.4
Owning shops	27	7.3
Selling papers	1	0.3
Shoe repairs	5	1.5
Others	33	9.3

Source: researcher's survey

- **Suburbanization, Poverty and Poverty Culture**

Suburbanization is not only considered *poverty* from an economic, housing, urban services point of view, but also, it is known to be poverty from a culture point of view. The culture of poverty in suburban areas is produced through mechanisms such as unstable employment and unemployment, household size and high unemployment, and low incomes. The culture of poverty is the adaptation of the poor and their reaction to the low positions of their social class in a class-leading, individualist and capitalist society (Lewis, 1985: 8). This culture shows that such people have failed in succeeding in values and goals in the larger communities and have no chance of winning them, thus trying to adapt themselves to the disappointment and despair resulting from this failure (Lewis, 1985, 10). The culture of poverty is created one day in suburban and poor societies, and it gradually goes from one generation to another and sustains because it affects children. Children accept the values and behaviors of the subculture (i.e. automatically) and thus have no readiness to acquire the full benefits of transforming the conditions and increasing the opportunities that they may have had throughout their lives. (Lewis, 1985: 9).

Oscar Lewis describes the features of suburban people as follows:

- They are disappointed and despaired
- They lack the power to dominate miseries and excitements.
- They have a little ability to satisfy themselves and spend time.

Researcher's findings about poverty in suburban neighborhoods indicate that only 4.4 percent of the suburban population has a good financial and economic status, 52 percent are moderate, and 43.6 percent are poor, which suggests a generalized poverty in these areas.

- Social Harms and Suburban Areas

Here, the ground for some deviant behavior is to some extent possible. Due to the high social disappointments and frustration among suburban people, the tendency to a variety of social deviations such as addiction, robbery, prostitution and vandalism is high. Immigrants are located on the margins of the city culture and their behavior is not normal. On the other hand, their previous values also become loose. And this problem is so deep among the second and third generation of immigrants that it itself leads to the emergence of phenomena such as the gap of generations (Vahida, 2003). With previous values loosening, and while the people have not yet been able to attract the social values of the city, abnormalities or what the French sociologist Emile Durkheim terms as "Anomaly or Anomy" occur, which causes the incidence of abnormalities and deviances in the new generation of suburban people (Saeed Far, 1998). On the other hand, heterogeneity and diversity in the city along with anonymity, greatness and diversity, provide a ground for the emergence of anomic and deviant behaviors (Naghdi, 2003, 127).

For example, most suburban people in the province of Kermanshah and its cities in particular are addicted (68 percent), selling drugs (33percent), robbery and theft (54.8 percent), fights, (62.2percent) and spree. For more than 90 percent of the suburban people, unemployment and poverty are social inequalities that are extensively and largely prevalent in the neighborhood.

Table (3): The status of social harms in the suburbs of Saghez

Scale Harms	Low	Partially	High	Never	Unanswered
Addiction	11.8	13.6	68.2	5.6	0.8
Selling opioids	11.8	22.7	52.1	11.8	1.6
Robbery	21.1	32.6	32.9	12.6	0.8
Prostitution	46.8	11.5	6.4	34.8	0.5
Altercation and fights	12.6	24.9	54.8	7.8	
Poverty	1.6	6.1	90.4	1.1	0.8
Unemployment	1.3	1.2	95.1	0.8	0.3

Source: researcher's survey

Conclusion

In general, it can be concluded that the suburban population, as a percentage of the urban population of Iran, faces many socio-economic and cultural problems that brings about difficulties and bad consequences through the process of sustainable development. The suburban neighborhoods are facing a serious health problem, and about 63 percent of the respondents were not happy with the health status of their neighborhood or had little satisfaction. In these areas, there are many types of diseases, especially infectious and contagious diseases. In terms of housing, the families of suburban homes have an average of 2 rooms. The density of people in residential units in the suburban areas of Saqhez is 5.64. In these neighborhoods, the rate of social harm, such as prostitution, theft, addiction, gambling, drug sales, sales and consumption of alcohol, litigation, and conflict is high. For more than 90 percent of

the suburban people, unemployment and poverty are social inequalities that are extensively and largely prevalent in the neighborhood.

Suggestions

- Officials should, by taking policies and addressing social development of suburban areas and empowering people living there, help them remove their problems.
- Paying attention to the occupational health of residents working in the suburban areas and paying attention to the physical, social and cultural integrity of suburban people, such as the experience of the organizing and empowering of tannery workers on the outskirts of Indian cities, which was aimed to improve the living conditions of workers through participation and education, and to make easier their access to drinking water and sewage networks
- The public security situation in the suburban areas is lower than the city. Therefore, the more serious police presence and the creation of a police station in the suburban areas will increase the security factor in these areas.
- -Custodian organizations should reduce the cost of urban services, due to the financial weakness of the suburban inhabitants.
- Provision of counseling services to immigrants and newcomers in various fields.
- A more serious and non-radical struggle with the basic issues of their concern, namely poverty, unemployment, addiction, spree and social harm.
- Eliminating health deficiencies and providing access to educational services and amenities.
- Since immigration is not in itself a criminal offense and has been a natural process in human history, so what is certain is the composition of immigrants, the rate of immigration and the fate of immigrants in the destination and the consequences of it at the origin, which should be programmed in such a way as not to interfere with the sustainable development in the urban environment.

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