
THE CHANGES IN FAMILY STRUCTURE AND FAMILIAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN IRAN (Sociological Study)

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Introduction

Though the family seems to be a small social unit, it is one of the main and essential institutions in the society. In fact, we should consider the family as the founding element of the society, the protecting canon of respectable and transcendent values and traditions, steady essence of stable social relations and kinsmen's links, the commencing and emerging point for compassionate emotions, the center of people's most intimate relations. Besides, the family is the fostering cradle of thought and morality and human transcendence¹. Because of the family's significance, 1994 was called *The Universal Year of Family*. Islamic republic of Iran, in addition to the universal day of the family, named Zel Hajeh 25th the day that 'Ensan' surah was sent to Prophet Mohammad *Family Day*, as a sign of a special consideration for family². Domestic violence is a phenomenon that has existed throughout the history of family. Therefore, it does not happen in one society only, it is a universal phenomenon that even the most sophisticated countries of the world fall victim to. What is more discouraging is that women not only get abused in the society as a particular group but are also maltreated in their families by their husbands and other members, and are the victims of many physical and mental cases of violence. The main issue is how in a warm and intimate family atmosphere one can think of killing any of his/her family members. It is so startling! Where do the roots and origins of this phenomenon date?

Grand social presumptions explain men's violence against women as follows:

1) Historical model of America: where violence has become ordinary and has become acceptable. For that reason, this presumption predicts violence.

2) Patriarchic, racist, class-based, bisexual, heterosexual, sexist, narcissist viewpoints and the economic oppression of institutional structures get into transaction with old models and predict violence against women.

3) Sexist institutional structure of the family advocates unequal power relation between the two sexes;

In this respect, this presumption predicts men's violence against women.

4) Observing, experiencing, and learning violence in the parental family provide grounds for men's violence against women.

5) The social belief in defining a sexual role for women leads to a role contradiction and can provoke violence against women.

¹ Seyf, S., 1989, "Familial growth theory", Tehran, Azzahra University Publications.

² Ahmadi, A. A., "The universal family day", Peyvand, 1892, p. 5.

Familial Violence

Familial or domestic violence is the most prevalent form of violence against women. Familial violence is the violence that happens in a private environment, usually among people who are connected with one another based on blood or law. Familial violence, regardless of its neutral word form, is usually a crime related to a "certain gender", namely men's violence against women. The nature of familial violence is so that it rapidly becomes a torment for the family. Most of the times, the assaults made with intent to cause mental and physical damage also insult women.

The unpredictability of such assaults and their inappropriateness to women's morale and spirit adds to its resulting torment and suffering for women. The possibility of such assaults continuing at home for women stretches from week to week and may persist for years (until the woman's death).

Violence towards women can be divided into four types: physical, mental, economic, and sexual. Physical violence has an extended domain ranging from beating to murder. Mental violence includes acts of emotional maltreatment, insulting and showing contempt, suspicion, and seclusion. Economic violence is limiting women financially and controlling their properties. Sexual violence can be seen in the form of rape and sexual abuse³.

In the United States of America, each year, around two million women are battered by their intimate partners. This kind of rough treatment results in 7300 hospitalizations and 1500 death cases⁴.

Mc Kelly et al⁵ expressed that familial violence can be used by parents, spouse, or other family members. In a study involving 1952 women, 108 women (5.5 percent) reported that they had only experienced violence over the past year; while 639 women said that they had faced violence during their childhood or in teenage years. Hen Sun Rowless-Kepp Retta (2004) states that some research studies reported the prevalence of violence against women up to 80 percent. Main mental harassments resulting from violence against women include a feeling of helplessness, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and depression. Based on more recent studies, violence against women can bring about more serious consequences such as suicide, attacking the offender severely, or even murder⁶.

Theoretical Framework

As a subject study, familial violence is explained by many theories. In our survey we have deployed 'Dominance' and 'Inter-generational Transmission' theories that are briefly illustrated below:

³ Gelles, R. J., and M.A. Strauss, 1998, "Intimate violence: the causes and consequences of abuse in the American family", New York, Simon and Schuster.

⁴ Barbara, L. Kass-Bartelmeters, M.P.H, C.H.E.S., research inaction, issue#15, June 2004, women and domestic violence: program and tools that implore care victims.

⁵ Mc. Cauley, Jeanne, David E. Kern, Kenkolodner, Laurie Dill, Arthur F. Schroeder, Halle K. Dechant, Janice Ryden, Eric B. Bass and Len R. Derogatis, 1995, "The battering syndrome"; prevalence and clinical characteristics of domestic violence in primary care internal medicine practice", *Annals of internal medicine*, 123(10)

⁶ Golding, Jacqueline M., "Intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders: A meta-analysis", *Journal of the Family Violence*, 14(2), 1999.

1) Inter-Generational Transmission theory is one of theories related to familial violence which is based on social cognition. According to this theory, the men who are abused by their father or have observed their mothers' being abused by their father, more probably would maltreat their wives and children. In such families, violence is an accepted device for solving problems. These families transfer violence to next generations. Therefore, stopping maltreatment requires prevention of physical or mental and punishment inter-personal violence for children. (Johnson, 1988)

2) Dominance Theory: Conigue in systematic theories put the emphasis on the importance of dominance principal for maintaining familial integrity and unity. Maintaining family's unity is a priority. He considers dominance in families as legal and authorized, not acknowledging that the increasing equality among men and women is the product of women's personal rights, but the product of unsafe familial relations, which would result in social tremor and familial corruptness. Hence, men can use violence with women to maintain this unity and dominance in the families⁷.

Conclusion

Recently, the authorities have also considered the issue of familial violence. The access to social, economic, and cultural resources has grown exceedingly, although there are not sufficient resources, yet.

Men's violence against women, starting with marriage includes physical, mental, social, and economic issues. In the past, women used to accept it as something normal and natural and even considered their husbands' maltreat and wrangles to be a part of marriage. Besides, the existing social approaches implied that men enjoy more advantaged than women and that women should either put up with men's behavior or change their own behavior so that their marital life could persevere and the family would not lose their husbands or fathers.

As we know, familial violence cannot be studied on its own, as long as the social system is based on the inequalities; unless fundamental changes take place in social regulations, there is no way to handle this phenomenon.

Now that numerous studies have been made by human rights activists, we can observe significant changes in the case of family structure and social structure in all developed and developing societies. Many Iranian girls and women had no opportunity to access cultural, social, and economic resources in the society and family. However, nowadays, because of the changes in social structure and their reflection on Iranian families' structure, a lot of Iranian girls and women have high education as a cultural resource; they have a job and income as an economic resource. They also enjoy governmental and familial supports as emotional and financial supports, which can be considered as their social resource. In Barron's opinion⁸, social and familial supports as an accessible social resource protect women from internal pressures and external threats. In fact, the supports bestowed on women by the society or the family can reduce the amount of violence against

⁷ Raeesi Sarteshizi, Amrolah, 1992, "Violence against women and effective elements on it, a case study in Shahrekord, Women science and research magazine, no. 3.

⁸ Khaghani Fard, 1993, "The study of the relation between wife-abuse and suicidal tendencies and hurting spouse in Tehranian women", women studies M.A. thesis, Azzahra University.

women. These emotional supports require having necessary skills to request others' help while having trouble. Social network's support, for instance, offers an opportunity to access the membership of that network; self-value support lets the woman know that she is a valuable person and can employ her particular abilities to overcome the problems; instrumental support implies accessing financial resources and required services to cope with problems and difficulties; and finally informational support, when she can get the required information. All of these play a significant part in increasing women's awareness and abilities, self-confidence and self-image. Khaghani Fard's studies⁹ on wife-abuse show that the women who enjoy social and familial supports in three main aspects (thinking, emotions and economics) are less abused by their husbands, they seldom attempt suicide, as well as have little desire to hurt their husbands, because of other forfeiting methods such as supporting resources (i.e. a job, social status) and familial supports that reduce the problems they might encounter because of their husbands' use of violence.

However, unfortunately, in spite of so many changes in the rural and urban families' structure, we still can observe men's use of mental violence with their wives. A feeling of vulnerability, lack of self-confidence, anxiety and depression, self-contempt, mental disorders, and eventually suicide, are the main consequences of mental violence. Mental violence leaves grave costs in the family entity and the mental health of its members. One should definitely not forget that due to families' structural changes and the decrease of traditional roles in Iranian families, one can observe an outstanding reduction in the amount of men's physical violence towards women. The changes in the structure of patriarchic Iranian families have positively affected the families and especially the Iranian girls and women.

ՄԻՏՐԱ ԽԱԳԱՆԻ ՖԱՐԴ – Ընտանիքի կառուցվածքային փոփոխություններն ու կանանց հանդեպ ընտանեկան բռնությունը Իրանում (սոցիոլոգիական ուսումնասիրություն) – Հոդվածում քննարկվում է կանանց հանդեպ ընտանեկան բռնության հիմնախնդիրն արդի իրանական հասարակությունում: Իրանական հասարակության դեմոկրատացման միտումների արդյունքում նկատվում է ընտանիքում և հասարակության մեջ կնոջ դերի աճ, ինչը վերջին հաշվով նպաստում է կնոջ հանդեպ ընտանեկան բռնության նվազմանը: Սակայն, այդ բացասական երևույթի ամբողջական հաղթահարման համար անհրաժեշտ է հաղթահարել իրենց դարն ապրած բազում բացասական կարծրատիպերն ու ավանդույթները:

МИТРА ХАГАНИ ФАРД – Изменения структуры семьи и семейное насилие против женщин в Иране (социологическое исследование). – В статье рассматривается проблема семейного насилия против женщин в современном иранском обществе. Постепенная демократизация иранского общества приводит к росту роли женщин в семье и в обществе. Это в конечном счете способствует сокращению семейного насилия против женщин, но чтобы полностью покончить с этим явлением, необходимо преодолеть множество изживших себя негативных стереотипов, обычаев и традиций.

⁹ 3. Barron, Robert A., and Don Byrne, "Social psychology", 8th edition, Boston, M.A., USA, Allyn and Bacon, 1997.