Iranians' Attitudes about the Ideal Spouse: Preferences for Spouse Selecting and Transformations in Recent Decades

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ABSTRACT

Family is the primary institution in which the initial experiences of social relations take shape. Human beings are born into families and form their own families in return. The present study concerns the major preferences and criteria that Iranians hold for selecting the right spouse. The main question of the study is about the transformations that spouse choosing, and its underlying criteria, have undergone. It assesses the attitudinal aspects regarding the "ideal spouse" and is concerned about the choice of either husband or wife. The chief method of the study is secondary analysis of quantitative data gathered at the national level. The sources of the research are comprised of all surveys that measure Iranians 15 years old and above. The findings of the research indicate that the changes of Iranians' understanding of the "ideal spouse" have been next to nothing. People's behavioural patterns in choosing a spouse do not entirely match their attitudinal preferences; in other words, despite the change in behaviour, Iranians' preferences for the ideal spouse has hardly changed in attitude.

Keywords: Attitudinal preferences, background variables, cultural change, ideal spouse, preferred wife, preferred husband, spouse selecting

INTRODUCTION

Family in Iran is one of the determining factors of social status and any transition in this regard would affect understandings of the whole social realities (Azadarmaki, 2007; Koutlaki, 2010). Among the major transitions in the past decades in relation to the Iranian family are those in people's

attitudes about the ideal spouse and its characteristics (Daniel & Mahdi, 2006). The diagnosis of Iranians' criteria and preferences for the ideal spouse is key to understanding family transitions, specifically, and social transformations, generally. In other terms, understanding the characteristics of the ideal spouse enhances the understanding of a stratum of more general social transformations; because, following the gradual encounter with various social groups and the consequential evolution of their mindsets, individuals' choices, including spouse selection, a critical decision in one's personal life, changes as well. Individuals are increasingly liberated from family hierarchical power relations, thanks to the educational, occupational, and skill acquisition procedures they normally undergo in their modern lifestyle. The variety of alternative lifestyles, other than what family background traditionally dictated to individuals, presumably fundamentally changes people's spouse selection habits and ideal spouse criteria (Abbasi-Shavazi & McDonald, 2012). The increased level of education for both sexes, the equal allocation of facilities for public education regardless of sex (in contrast to the norm in previous decades, especially pre-revolution) (Asadi, 1975; Touba, 1971), the escalation in urbanization, and the diversity of skills and specializations, have entailed the social mobility for both sexes. Diversified social encounters, in its own turn, have improved the opportunities in front of social actors. For example, the propagation of proper circumstances for higher education has provided the mating age youth with wider choices in spouse selection. Individuals are no longer obliged to choose from among the narrow list of alternatives their families recommend them. This very fact has optimized cultural intermingling of different family types (Azadarmaki, 2007; Behnam, 1992).

The assessment of spouse choosing behaviours and ideal spouse attitudes is vital for the analysis of the changes in the Iranian family not only because marriage is a family indicator, but also since the process of family dissociation and related social issues are explained based on spouse selection behaviour and the transition hereby taking place (Strong & Cohen, 2016). Divorce, late marriage, celibacy, and more are among such issues that could be explained relying on a proper understanding of spouse choosing patterns (Azadarmaki, 2016; Ember & Ember, 2003). On the other hand, there is no literature that presents a comparative analysis of spouse choosing behaviour and the transformation in Iranians' attitude about the ideal spouse, mostly having sufficed to briefings on the condition of spouse choosing behaviours. This is another indicator that highlights the significance of the present study.

Considering the Iranian shifting social structures, the present study aims to understand the Iranians' attitude about the "ideal spouse". The central question of the study asks about the quality of attitudinal changes regarding the ideal spouse; considering the growing rate of exogamy among the new generations of

Iranians, what changes have taken place in their attitudes about the ideal spouse compared to other generational groups? The peripheral question of the study concerns the theoretical explanations behind the situation. Other than the descriptive approach of the study in investigating the two-spouse choosing behaviour, and the preferable spouse attitudes, it tries to outline the influential factors bringing about changes.

Review of Literature

Several books, articles, and studies deal with transformations in spouse-choosing marriage patterns among Iranian families. There are analytical studies in relation to the family transition. A canonical survey on the attitudinal and behavioural transitions regarding spouse selecting in Iran is Jacqueline Touba that was conducted in Shiraz city of Iran (Touba, 1971). Furthermore, *Family Structures and Kinship in Iran* is one of the first books that deals with various aspects of family and marriage transition being predisposed to urbanization and industrialization sways (Behnam, 1971). The author posits that chief transitions in family and marriage patterns are dictated by migration, occupational mobility because of specialization, and the consequential geographic mobility, especially of the youth (Ibid). In Family Transitions, the same author investigates various aspects of family as influenced by modernization and brings international examples to materialize his thesis (Behnam, 1992). In his belief, the future prospect of family transitions will be determined by demographic changes,

senility, fertility, urbanization, migration, and scientific progresses (Ibid). What these studies share with the present study is the emphasis they put on patterns of spouse choosing by referring to secondary data in the field. What Behnam has demonstrated in these two surveys is the transformation of spouse selecting habits of Iranians under the influence of social variables which is adopted by the present study.

The disadvantage of these studies, nonetheless, is the perceptible lack of a comprehensible theoretical structure in their analysis of statistical data. Another series of studies have researched family transitions by emphasising demographic and biological discussions like that of cousin marriage (Abbasi-Shavazi & Askari Nadoushan, 2005; Abbasi-Shavazi, McDonald, & Hoseini Chavoshi, 2003; Kazemipour, 2004; Mahmoudian, 2004; Mirzaei, 1999; Zanjani, 2006). Others source to regional or local surveys and examine various aspects of family transitions, again including the manifest case of cousin marriage, in specified regions and localities (Abbasi-Shavazi & Torabi, 2006).

Considering family transition as a consequence of globalisation, a number of surveys by non-Iranian and Iranian researchers are concentrated on spouse selecting and its transformations. The attitudinal and behavioural transformations in this regard are among the variables concerned in the present study. Some of these surveys study the condition of Iran under the global transformational trends (Abbasi-Shavazi & McDonald, 2012; Daniel

& Mahdi, 2006; Koutlaki, 2010). Some, on the other hand, have elaborated on the general trends influencing family transition and spouse selecting in different societies (Blossfeld & Timm, 2012; Henriksen & Kurten, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical approaches in investigating attitudinal and behavioural changes towards spouse choosing are divisible into two categories: the first puts the emphasis on the structural aspects and the institutional changes resulting from them. Outstanding in this category is William Good's convergence theory of family. Based on the institutional approach, modernization and development cause families to gradually follow western and European models. According to Parsons' structural functionalism, the institution of family manifests gradual differentiations in various dimensions towards the ultimate independence of actors from a priori models. As a result, not only do family structures change in household, role systems, hierarchy, and spouses' relationships, but patterns of spouse choosing have a propensity toward exogamy, as exogamy is perceived to better match structurally differentiated models and gives the youth greater roles for choosing. The more traditional paternalistic hierarchy is extinguished, the more diverse spouse choosing patterns become. Under his discussion of universal family revolution, Good suggests a pattern of changes in family structures in which the preference is for a nuclear family. In his opinion, families gradually change into universal,

homogeneous configurations (Good, 1970). In Good's model of family transition, the structure of families keeping pace with development finds the potential to break off the foundations of traditional order and gives way to the modern patterns of spouse choosing that better match with parents' control-free way of life. This explanation applies to a class of bourgeois families that develop with modernization and the canon of freedom (Poster, 1988).

According to this model, the change in spouse choosing patterns would presumably be simultaneous with changes in youth's (as the marriage age group) attitudes about the preferred spouse; because the freedom in spouse choosing is concomitant with structural changes in the social life experience, and free patterns of choice are expected to find more primacy in shaping attitudes. In other words, changes toward the realization of nuclear, independent families obtain concrete as well as attitudinal dimensions.

The second category of theories gives more weight to the attitudinal aspects and emphasizes the role of cultural changes and value system in causing transformation in behaviours and mentalities. Prominent among others, the second demographic transition theory (SDT) analyses fertility transitions in the industrial west in association with changes in attitudes, mindsets, and family and parenting values, to acknowledge the synchronized impact of social, economic, and cultural facts on family changes. These factors, combined, have contributed to family transitions

becoming an independent, liberated institution (Sobotka, 2008).

According to this theory, again, spouse choosing has tended toward exogamy, with a shift from the previous constrictions towards individual freedom taking place. The second class of theories differs from the first in that, besides the already taken-for-granted role of socio-economic and technological transitions, they recognize in their analyses of family transition the role of the actors' attitudes and mindsets, too. As a result, it becomes essential to reach an explanation of the emerging family patterns that conform to the ongoing cultural transitions. According to SDT, the progressive increase in individual freedom morally, religiously, and politically is the basic cause for family transition. Secularism, freedom movements, post-materialist values of individual improvement and self-expression, mistrust in organizations, and intolerance toward any outsider exercise of power in one's personal matters are principles of the value transition that, in its own turn, has contributed to the idea of self-determination with one's personal life (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004).

Based on either theory, it is expected that modernization and development bring concomitant changes to family structures and patterns of spouse choosing. The theoretical advantage of the second class of theories is its recognition of facilitating mentalities based in cultural backgrounds. The present study inclined by this approach is going to comparatively investigate the condition of spouse choosing behaviour

and attitudes in Iran. According to Good, the diversity in spouse choosing patterns is essentially entwined with the liberation from the declining tradition of paternalistic hierarchies. Such transformations are in concurrence with the universal homogeneous transitions that enforce Europeanization and the nuclearization of families dictated by the inexorable modernization. Based on the second set of theories, these transitions are explained by referencing the attitudinal transformations. Under these circumstances caused by the concurring socio-economic, cultural, and technological transitions, the prospect for individual autonomy in spouse choosing improves.

METHODS

To answer the questions of the study, comparative methods are required for data analysis. Comparative study is a conventional method in sociological studies that investigates the transformations in one field, culture, or time setting and compares the results with changes in parallel fields, cultures, and settings. Therefore, dynamics study is a form of comparative study of phenomena across time and place. The major method in the present study is secondary analysis of quantitative data gathered from national surveys to investigate the trend of changes in spouse choosing patterns. In this study, several national surveys whose results provide the opportunity to compare are put to analysis.

One of the oldest surveys investigating the attitudinal and behavioural transformations in Iran is "Cultural Orientations and Social

Attitudes in Iran", conducted by Asadi in 1975. Parts of the survey examine the familial behaviours and orientations in Iran with emphasis on marriage, spouse choosing, and ideal husband/wife indicators (Asadi, 1975). In 2004, a parallel survey was conducted by Goudarzi with the aim of comparing the results with the 1975 findings. Goudarzi used the main items of the Asadi survey, including indicators for measuring family-related attitudes and behaviours in Iran, and enacted slight modifications and supplementations to make the three-decade-long social change trends comparable (Goudarzi, 2005). Another national survey among the sources for cross-sectional and longitudinal studies is the one Goudarzi conducted in 2004 titled, "Iranians' Attitudes and Orientation: Second Wave". The first part of the survey is concerned with family values, including marriage norms and patterns of spouse choosing (Goudarzi, 2004). The last survey analysed here is Ghafari's 2015 national survey on *Iranians' Attitudes and Values*. Among the indices he evaluates is Iranians' attitudes and preferences in spouse selecting. Beside these three, Mohseni (2000) is also considered as a complementary source for the present evaluation.

It is important to reinstate the lack of inclusive data that covers the whole duration of the study, as some of the time settings have passed unsurveyed. This has entailed many restrictions in performing statistical analyses; the comprehensive understanding of the situation requires thorough and compact data from all time spans under study, while the review of literature does not direct to thematic results in the form of distinct surveys and research. All that is available is a series of large-scale surveys that have intermittently measured aspects of spouse choosing patterns. Consequently, a selective approach confines this study to the distinct indicators that measure Iranians' values, attitudes, and behaviours. Among the literature at hand, Asadi's survey, the parallel survey by Goudarzi, and the second wave of surveys, complemented by a set of other sporadic data found in the literature of the field, comprise the main sources of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Iranians' behaviour in spouse choosing

In recent decades, spouse choosing patterns have dramatically changed (Azadarmaki, 2016). Based on data available in Table 1 and considering generational variables, it seems that despite the decrease in generational gap in spouse choosing patterns in three decades, the youth are still more oriented toward exogamy than other generations. This can be explained by the fact that the exposure to more diverse situations and groups in comparison to previous generations has propelled them to exogamic choices.

Table 1
Spouse choosing patterns in three decades by generational groups (1975-2005)

Variable Attitude	1975			2005		
	Youngster	Adult	Elderly	Youngster	Adult	Elderly
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Cousin marriage	35	46.5	52.5	20.9	26.5	28.4
Exogamy	44	33.5	26.5	51.7	49.5	45.7
No difference	19	17	17	25.9	23	25.5
No Response	2	3	4	1.5	1	0.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Asadi (1975); Goudarzi (2005)

Education level is another variable that influences spouse choosing behaviours. Based on the data in Table 2, the more educated people are, the less their preference for cousin marriage. It should also be noted that the whole rate of cousin marriage among all groups has noticeably lowered.

Table 2
Spouse choosing patterns in three decades by education (1975-2005)

Variable Attitude	1975					2005				
	Illiterate	Primary school	Middle school	Diploma	Higher education	Illiterate	Primary school	Middle school	Diploma	Higher education
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Cousin marriage	52	35	16	13	12	35.9	28.8	22.4	17.9	15.1
Exogamy	27	46	61	65	65	39.8	49	53.4	52.4	53.3
No difference	17	17	20	19	22	23.4	21.5	22.9	28.5	29.8
No Response	4	2	3	3	1	0.9	0.7	1.3	1.2	1.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Asadi (1975); Goudarzi (2005)

Just as the attitudinal preferences in spouse choosing behaviours do, behavioural aspects corroborate the gradual decline in cousin marriage rates concurring with the pace of modernization (Good, 1970; Poster, 1988). No comprehensive study has yet examined the issue. According to Behnam (1971), the closer to urban areas, the lower the rate of marrying relatives Abbasi-Shavazi, McDonald and Chavoshi (2008). The comparison between the rural areas (such as Torbat Heidariyeh in Khorasan Province) and Tehran neighbourhood of (Javadiyeh and Salmaniyeh) with family samples in Tehran during 1970s shows that the rate of cousin marriage in rural areas is about

32 to 33 percent compared to 29.2 percent in Tehran, neighbouring country, and 25.1 percent in Tehran, main city. Among relative marriages, marriage between paternal first cousins is of highest frequency both in country areas and in cities.

A key point to note in this regard is the logic of transformation in spouse choosing patterns not showing an even decline. Cousin marriage remains a yet ideal type, even with the decrease in age and increase in education, equalling exposure to new circumstances, expectations, and priorities, with the pattern changing considerably. Data related to the objective condition of changes in cousin marriage after three decades imply a smooth trend in various provinces. The findings of Abbasi-Shavazi and his colleagues (2003) in four Western Azerbaijan, Sistan and Balouchistan, Gillan, and Yazd show the rate of such marriages at approximately 40 percent. Sistan province, with 77.4 percent, obtains the highest rate of cousin marriage, followed by Yazd (46.3 percent), Western Azarbayjan (32.6 percent), and Gillan (24 percent).

The findings of Sa'adat and his colleagues in all provinces corroborate the smooth continuation of cousin marriage in Iran. Data in this study indicate a fluctuation from 16 percent in the north to 47 percent in the east. The central, northwestern, western, and southern parts of the country rates are 35 percent, 39 percent, 41 percent, and 43 percent respectively (Abbasi-Shavazi & Torabi, 2006).

According to the studies on spouse choosing patterns, it seems that cousin marriage is still the preferred style of marriage among parts of the population in Iran. As modernization progresses, the general rate of cousin marriage declines, but a relative smoothness in the continuation of cousin marriage is still detected. The findings of 1970s were indicative of kinship not only as central in spouse choosing patterns but also in all respects of family life and controlling conjugal relationships (Behnam, 1971). The findings of more recent surveys show a partial sovereignty of family hierarchy in exogamic marriages in a way that even marriages with non-relatives is supervised by the extended family (Azadarmaki, 2007).

Speaking based on the second wave of surveys on attitudes and values which is presented in Table 3, it seems that the almost all generations are against cousin marriage, while above 25 percent prioritize it. The findings are generalizable to the entire population with 99 percent accuracy.

Table 3

Cousin marriage pattern by generational groups (2004)

Variable Attitude	Youngster	Adult	Elderly
	%	%	%
Disagree	59	53.5	52.6
Uncertain	12	11.2	12.3
Agree	29	35.3	35
Total	100	100	100
Statistics		0.057	
Sig		0.000	
Source: Goudarzi (2004)			

This tells about the relatively smooth trend in levels of cousin marriage preference among parts of the population (comprising one fourth of Iranians) despite its declining status due to diversifying experiences and the already discussed exposure to new circumstances (Goudarzi, 2004).

Attitudinal changes concerning the ideal spouse

As with respondents' opinion about the ideal spouse, presented in Table 4, amicability and courteousness are atop the list of the ideal spouse among all generations in three decades (Asadi, 1975; Goudarzi, 2005). Then comes fondness for family. Although honesty and decency have downgraded within the list, this might be due to the two terms connotational changes. Decency is a concept that suffers ambiguity due to different meanings it finds based on the situation; in the case of women, it implies modesty and adherence to hijab, while it denotes the observance of gaze among men (Moghissi, 2007). What matters is the permanence of the attitudinal hierarchy and the durability of dominant preferences among Iranians.

Table 4
Ideal spouse criteria in three decades by generational groups (1975-2005)

Variable Attitude	1975			2005		
	Youngster	Adult	Elderly	Youngster	Adult	Elderly
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Family fondness	15	16.5	15	8.5	9	9
Amicability and courteousness	36.5	33	36.5	46.9	45.7	45.7
Activeness	9.5	12	13	4.9	5.6	6.4
Occupation	2.5	2	2.5	8.5	5.8	5.9
Literacy	4	3	1.5	2	1.7	0.6
Honesty and decency	23.5	26.5	25.5	1.2	2	1.8

Source: Asadi (1975); Goudarzi (2005)

Based on education and as observed in Table 5, amicability and courteousness are the primary characteristics for an ideal spouse in most respondents' beliefs. At odds with what is conceived in everyday observation, beauty and charm are among the peripheral characteristics favoured by only one percent of respondents and only mentioned under the item "other". The terminological explanation of the change in the hierarchical rank of decency that was explained above could be verified by interpreting data based on education, too.

Table 5
Ideal spouse criteria in three decades by education (1975-2005)

Variable Attitude	1975					2005				
	Illiterate	Primary school	Middle school	Diploma	Higher education	Illiterate	Primary school	Middle school	Diploma	Higher education
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Family fondness	13	19	19	15	15	4.6	6.6	9	10.3	14.7
Amicability and courteousness	34	37	37	38	38	50	49.9	45.5	44.4	39.9
Activeness	11	11	9	7	12	6.7	5.7	5.4	5	4
Occupation	2	2	2	2	1	9	7.3	8.7	5.5	4.3
Literacy	3	3	3	7	8	0.7	0.8	2.2	2	2.7
Honesty and decency	27	23	20	22	28	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.8	1.7

Source: Asadi (1975); Goudarzi (2005)

The value-laden hierarchy in shaping Iranians' mentalities toward the ideal spouse is the central issue that must be considered and, in this respect, changes in certain peripheral attributes should not mislead and undermine top priorities among the value-laden sequence of attributes, namely amicability and courteousness.

In the early decades after the revolution, due to the imposed Iran-Iraq war and various sanctions enacted upon the country, the scope of national surveys was lost. Governments, rather than contemplating social research, should have try to provide the people with their primary needs and fight the war. Hence, no valid surveys have remained from the first post-revolution decade. About 15 years after the Revolution, in 2000, Manuchehr Mohseni conducted a national survey (Mohseni, 2000).

In the 1975 survey by Asadi, where Mohseni was the second researcher and Asadi's assistant, the preference for women in hijab was examined (Asadi, 1975). In the 2000 survey, however, there is no item specifically asking about the attitude or behaviour of people regarding hijab. Therefore, the 2000 survey does not directly relate to the present article, since there is no question of hijab and its dimensions in it. Despite this, the closest part of this survey to the present article is the item

put forward by respondents in response to one of the survey questions. This question is about measuring the most important characteristics of the "ideal woman." The first choice offered by people is "decency" as the most important feature of an ideal woman. One of the meanings of "decency" in Persian is clemency and chastity, and the opposite is misconduct (Dehkhoda, 2006). The notion of decency generally indicates a lady to be covered and not exposed to others' attention, especially by men. Therefore, this option has the closest meaning to the subject of the present article, i.e. hijab and cover. In Table 6, the attitude of the respondents towards the "ideal woman" is shown:

Table 6
Attitude towards the most important characteristics of an "Ideal Woman" (2000)

Variable Attitude	Decency	Well-behaviour	Family originality	Wealth	High education	Housewife	Good looking	Other	Unspecified	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Disagree	40.8	24.6	14.3	4.9	2.8	0.3	0.2	10.1	2	100

Source: Mohseni (2000)

As shown in the table above, more than 40% of the respondents described the most important feature of an "ideal woman" as "decency". For this reason, the most important feature of the "ideal woman" for 40% of the respondents was being covered and not being seen by men. From the above data, the minimum tendency of 40% of respondents is to observe the necessity of hijab for an ideal situation. In Table 7, respondents' attitude to the most important characteristic of "ideal woman" comes from the following underlying variables:

Table 7
Attitude about the most important characteristics of the "Ideal Woman Based on Background Variables (2000)"

Variable Attitude	Gender		Age					Education						Income				
	Men	Women	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 and over	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	High School Graduated	Higher diploma	BA and higher	to ۲۰	21-30	31-50	51-100	101 and over
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Decency	40.7	40.8	40.4	40.3	40.3	42	41	46.6	41.7	42	41.2	36.7	32.4	44.2	45	38.7	35.6	27.9
Courteousness	22.6	26.7	24.1	25.2	25.3	23.3	25.4	32.9	33.4	26.1	18.9	16	13.8	27.1	26.4	26.8	18.1	18.4
Literacy	3.1	2.5	4	2.1	2.5	2.7	3.1	3.2	2	4.4	3.1	1.8	3.3	2.1	2.7	2.2	4	3.4
Family of origin	15.3	13.4	14.3	15.3	15.1	15.2	11.5	7.8	8.5	10.8	20.4	24.9	19.6	12.4	13	14.4	19.3	17
Beauty	0.4	0.2	4	4	3	4	0	5	2	3	0	1.2	1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.8	2
Wealth	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.4	0	0	0	0.3	0.3	0	0
Homemaking	5	4.8	6.3	3.7	4.2	4.4	6	4.5	4.9	5.9	5.3	3	3.1	4.7	6.1	5	5	2
Other	10.5	9.8	6.8	9	9.3	8.4	10.2	0	7.5	7.6	9	13.6	22.2	7.4	5.3	10.6	15.5	28.6
Unknown	2.2	1.6	0	0	0	0	2.8	0	0	0	1.7	2.8	4.6	2	1.1	1.9	1.7	0.7
Total	98	98	100	100	100	100	97	100	100	100	98	97	95	98	99	98	98	99
Statistics	10.83		33.44					286.4						168.1				
Sig	0.14		0.2					0.000						0.000				

Source: Mohseni (2000)

As can be seen in the table above, there was no difference between men and women in prioritizing "decency" for an "ideal woman". For this reason, the relationship between gender and the most important characteristics of the "ideal woman" was not significant. This suggests that women like to be covered and not exposed. Of course, this does not mean the absence of women in society, but that women, like men, consider an ideal woman to have hijab. Among different age groups, there is no significant difference in the preference of "decency" as the most important characteristic of an "ideal woman". Hence, there is an age unity between distinct groups in prioritizing "decency". Various levels of education had a significant impact on respondents' attitude towards "decency". As education increases gradually, the decency priority is reduced. Illiterate respondents who consider "decency" as the most important "ideal woman" priority are 14.2 percent more than those who are educated with a bachelor's degree (46.6 percent versus 32.4 percent). With the increase in income level, the importance of "decency" gradually decreases, so the gap between the lowest income groups and the highest is 16.3 percent (44.2 percent versus 27.9 percent). Among the variables, the level of education and then the income level of the head of family had the most significant effect on the attitude of the respondents.

For understanding the attitudes toward the ideal spouse more properly, the data of the second wave survey on attitudes and values in 2004 are observed based on the same variable. In this survey, different items ask about the attributes of the ideal spouse, the ideal husband, and the ideal wife. Table 8 presents the data related to the popular opinion about the ideal wife:

Table 8
Ideal wife criteria (2004

Attitude	Percent
Decency	19.4
Faithfulness and piety	17.9
Amicability and courteousness	15.9
Honesty	8.9
Homemaking	7.4
Judgment	5.7
Contentment	5.3
Hijab observance	3.9
Docility	3.5
Mutual understanding	3.4
Family fondness	2.8
Forgiveness	1.7
Literacy	1.5
Beauty	0.5
Other	2.2
Total	100

Source: Goudarzi (2004)

Open-ended questions have the advantage of giving more freedom to the interpreter for manoeuvre, as the range of answers to these questions is not limited to pre-determined items. In Table 8, findings are graded from the highest to the lowest. Accordingly, the main characteristic for the ideal wife is "decency". When applied to women, decency connotes the observance (by women) for being covered in front of male gaze. Far from the perception of public exclusion of women, this means to optimize

protected public participation of them. The next major attributes after decency are faith and piety, together with amicability and courteousness. It could be inferred that in people's opinion, religion and morality together form the basis for the main characteristics of the ideal wife. People's religiosity has found deeper moral quality compared to the past. This why religious variables rival moral ones as top spouse choosing preferences. The viewpoint of respondents toward the first item, decency, has serious moral connotations, too, being associated with the culture of women's dressing in Iran. Other criteria of honesty and contentment similarly have moral connotations. It could be deduced that the determining element in shaping people's attitude about the ideal wife is more of a moral and religious nature than economic or physical (beauty and charm). This is a sincere consideration to the extent that docility is placed in the lower ranks at odds with the paternalistic culture in Iran.

Based on the findings in Table 8, sex is significantly influential in shaping the popular preferences for the ideal wife. Men prioritize decency as the characteristic of the ideal wife more than women do. Based on the definition of decency mentioned earlier, a similar difference is observed about hijab, as men have preferred hijab for the ideal wife three times as much as women have. Women have preferred other moral qualities instead. Therefore, both sexes prefer moral attributes; for men, this is manifested in form of the preference for hijab and decency, and for women it is manifested in the form of the preference of amicability, courteousness, faithfulness, piety, and honesty. Age is also significant in determining the ideal wife attributes. As the age of respondents increases, religious attributes find more force and distinction. On the other hand, with younger ages, the moral aspects are highlighted. The middle-aged and elderly respondents who are supposedly married admire women's domesticity and fondness for family compared to the youth. The same distinction applies to marital status, as married respondents who are practically engaged in conjugal matters are sterner in demanding women's homemaking duties than singles are. The degree holders are more concerned about the education of the wife than the illiterate. Concerning occupation, housekeeping is mainly considered a women's activity in Iran, as married women are the major contributors to homemaking at home. They prioritize domesticity and homemaking, their own attributes, more than other groups do. People who are more in daily contact with other groups do place more emphasis on the women's interactive capabilities and, for this reason, prioritize hijab and decency for the ideal wife more than other groups. Married respondents who have entered actual conjugal relationships are also concerned about hijab and decency compared to the singles that prioritize moral attributes such as honesty. The main priority among all groups is with moral and religious attributes while physical beauty gains the lowest rate at less than one percent (with a minute rise among pupils). Imagined characteristics like economic affluence (of

the ideal wife) is not mentioned at all or has so little importance as to be put under the item "other". Comparing the practical behaviour and attitudinal preferences of individuals shows that people act in ways that are not totally compatible with their ideals. In better words, not always is there congruity between attitudinal and behavioural spheres.

Because the preferences for the ideal wife and the ideal husband vary, the respondents' views about the latter are presented, too. Table 9 gives the general respondents' views about the ideal husband:

Table 9
Ideal husband criteria (2004)

Attitude	Percent
Faithfulness	22.7
Amicability and courteousness	21.1
Honesty	14.6
Responsibility	6.5
Mutual understanding	5.7
Activeness and hardworking	4.9
Judgment	4.9
Occupation	4.5
Authority	4.5
Health	2.5
Wealth	2.4
Decency	2
Nobility	1.9
Literacy	1.3
Other	0.5
Total	100

Source: Goudarzi (2004)

According to the data in Table 8, popular opinion about the ideal husband is similarly religiously and morally oriented. "Decency" has no considerable place among the

attributes of the ideal husband in the Iranian mindset. Nor do economic and physical attributes rival with religious and moral ones. Therefore, seemingly important attributes of proper occupation, acceptable economic situation, and education have no place among people's opinion about the ideal husband.

Amicability is more important in women's view than men, because women are the ones who become the men's spouses and they prefer well-mannered men. Like the ideal wife, in choosing the ideal husband, age matters in religious preferences as it finds more force with the rise in age, and is replaced by moral concerns among lower age groups. For youth who are seriously concerned with finding a proper occupation, occupation is more vitally the attribute of the ideal husband. It is evident that people's actual situation is effective in their preferences. Therefore, the respondents' occupation determines their attitude, as among those who are newly entering the workforce, like pupils and university students, having a proper occupation is more critically an attribute of the ideal husband. As the education increases, moral attributes such as honesty gain priority (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008). Therefore, moral concerns are central among all education groups, but they are more consciously adopted as the education increases. As a result, moral concerns decline in general, but concerns with specific moral attributes such as honesty are on the rise. Among the married who deal with conjugal issues directly, religious attributes are more important than moral ones. It is inferred that

moral attributes are more important among singles because morality helps them to shape their mental preferences, while religious determinations keep the conjugal life of the married ordered and principled.

In 2015, the popular opinion about the "ideal wife" was measured once again. Table 10 gives the findings of this survey:

Table 10
Ideal wife criteria (2015)

Attitude	Percent
Chastity	16.5
Faithfulness and piety	15.5
Amicability and courteousness	15
Hijab observance	8.8
Nobility	8.3
Family of origin	6.7
Honesty	3.3
Modesty	3.1
Literacy	2.7
Courtesy	2.6
Judgment	2.2
Beauty	2
Homemaking	1.6
Religious observances	1.3
Docility	1
Contentment	1
Health	0.9
Forgiveness	0.7
Mutual understanding	0.6
Occupation	0.5
Wealth	0.5
Family committedness	0.4
Age	0.4
Economic standing	0.4
Sameness and complementarity	0.2
Other	2.3
No response	1.5
Total	100

Source: Ghaffari (2015)

Based on Table 10, moral and religious aspects continue to be of utmost influence in shaping preferences toward the ideal wife. "Chastity" in this survey denotes a similar meaning to the "decency" that was observed in the findings of the 1975 and 2005 surveys. People's attitudes about the ideal wife has not changed significantly since. Rather, it has become more consciously adopted, having learned from the general morality or decency characteristics more concrete traits like chastity. Visual measures of beauty and economic preferences are not determining factors in respondents' opinion about the ideal wife, comprising less than two percent of all (Asadi, 1975; Goudarzi, 2005).

Since the preferences for the ideal husband differ from those for the ideal wife, the survey evaluates the characteristics of the "ideal husband" as well. Responses are presented in the following table.

Table 11
Ideal husband criteria (2015)

Attitude	Percent
Occupation	22.1
Amicability and courteousness	19.6
Faithfulness	16.1
Nobility	5.1
Family of origin	4.6
Honesty	4.3
Chastity	3.6
Health	3.2
Literacy	2.9
Judgment	1.9
Wealth	1.9
Economic standing	1.2
Modesty	1.2
Islamic rearing	1.2

Table 11 *(continue)*

Attitude	Percent
Vigor	0.9
Forgiveness	0.8
Adequate income	0.7
Family committedness	0.5
Accommodation	0.5
Courtesy	0.5
Beauty	0.4
Mutual understanding	0.3
Clothing manner	0.3
Family friendliness	0.2
Sublimity	0.2
Other	3.4
No response	2.4
Total	100

Source: Ghaffari (2015)

Accordingly, moral and religious preferences are suggested along with occupational concerns. This reveals that people's concerns in their attitude about the ideal husband are becoming more transparent. Since similar economic concerns are mentioned under income or accommodation items, it seems that by occupation, respondents mean something more, namely, self-sufficiency in the satisfaction of primary needs. Once more, the conclusion could be made that physical and material concerns remain below two percent among respondents. However, the arrangement of responses suggesting occupation along with moral and religious concerns underscores the autonomous connotations of the choice, rather than the material tendencies of the respondents (Azadarmaki, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Family in Iran is an endemic social institution that has experienced immense transition under modernization (Azadarmaki, 2014). A measure for understanding family transition in Iran is spouse selecting patterns and the attitudes toward the ideal spouse (Azadarmaki, 2007). Changes in this regard have been immense in the past decades and proportionate to the growing individual autonomy in spouse choosing behaviour (Azadarmaki, 2016; Ezazi, 1997). Nevertheless, the stable permanence of cousin marriages has established it as a major consideration among all items. Approximately one fourth of respondents from various groups and generations have manifested a preference for cousin marriage (Behnam, 1992). On the other hand, data show that youth and university degree holders alternate exogamy (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008). Surprisingly, the very groups that continue to arrange their exogamic marriages are in concert with the priorities of their extended families. Sometimes, even in urban areas, the commitment is extended to the whole kinship (Behnam, 1971). Individualism has in one respect contributed to the primacy of exogamic marriages; however, this needs to be analysed with caution (Behnam, 1992). The convergence theory of family does not provide the explanatory tool for investigating the totality of spouse choosing transformations (Blossfeld & Timm, 2012). The model of the western

nuclear family does not illuminate family structures and spouse choosing patterns in every respect. As a result, the theories that consider the attitudinal and value changes, such as second demographic transition, better met the purpose of this study in evaluating spouse choosing transformations (Sobotka, 2008). Based on such analysis, the attitudinal preferences about the ideal spouse and the resulting attitudinal pyramid of marriage has not changed dramatically; morality and religion continue to dominate the structure of Iranians' mindset about the ideal spouse (Asadi, 1975; Goudarzi, 2005; Ghaffari, 2015). Wealth and beauty occupy no significant place in this pyramid. This might not suggest the congruence between the objective and attitudinal respects but highlights the permanence of the prevalent pattern of earlier decades (Goudarzi, 2004). Of importance is a degree of stability in both objective and attitudinal patterns of spouse choosing, a reality that goes unnoticed in organizational and functional theories. Undoubtedly, Iranians' preferences in choosing the ideal spouse stems from their morality and religion. Another conclusion is that individual Iranians' mindsets have become plainer in structure. In the past, Iranians preferred a woman as the ideal wife who was decent and pious in manner (Asadi, 1975; Fathi, 1985). Decency continues to shape preferences about the ideal wife but has evolved to denote proper manner and modesty in behaviour best exemplified in observing hijab. In this regard, men appear more agreeable with women's social participation (Goudarzi, 2005), although it

seems that this conformity diverges from their real preference for the ideal wife (Goudarzi, 2004; Pourrezaanvar, 2003). In other words, men agree with women's public participation in general, but do not admire it as such for their own wives (Asadi, 1975; Goudarzi, 2004; 2005). In general, the Iranians' agreement with women's participation is provisioned by a preference for hijab and modesty (Faraji & Hamidi, 2014). What has changed about the ideal husband is the identification of self-sufficiency as an indicator emphasized under the term "occupation". The value hierarchy of respondents clarifies the idea behind suggesting occupation as a top priority; by occupation, the respondents intend less wealth or income and mean more self-sufficiency in satisfying personal primary needs. Such a moral interpretation better fits the other items, as items such as economic standing, adequate income level, and accommodation are relegated to the lowest two percent and even half percent (Ghaffari, 2015; Goudarzi, 2005). People admire a husband who can fulfil his needs, and this is translated into maintaining a proper occupation. It seems that popular opinion about the ideal husband is still moral in nature but attached more precision; it has distanced from the cliché amicability and courteousness and found exact instances. Comparison of data in the past four decades clarifies that the foundations of Iranians' preferences about the ideal spouse has not changed dramatically but has evolved to be more concrete. Iranians continue to prefer the morally and religiously observant spouse

(Henriksen & Kurtén, 2012). It seems that their religious tendencies have found moral interpretations, as moral groundings are underscored among the youth's responses.

Finally, attitudinal and behavioural dimensions do not essentially overlap (Joseph & Najmabadi, 2007). What constitutes Iranians' actions does not reflect their attitudes to the full; rather, attitudes are to express the deep idealized and, probably, unfulfilled beliefs. The absence of congruity neither suggests disagreement nor discrepancy; such a conclusion requires more detailed longitudinal data that measure both attitudinal and behavioural aspects. Based on the existing sources and findings reviewed in this study, the general inference is that people's criteria for the ideal spouse is not the basis for their actual spouse selecting behaviour. The present study attempted to assess behavioural as well as attitudinal aspects of Iranians' mindset about spouse choosing, to reach as much comprehensive a sketch of the future family transition as possible.

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