

Family development and the spouses' role behaviour in Iran

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Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed important changes in the patterns of marriage, fertility and longevity in Iran. Between 1986 and 2006, the singulate mean age at marriage of women and men increased by around three years (from 19.7 to 23.3 years for women and from 23.2 to 26.2 years for men) (calculated from the results of Iranian decennial censuses). During the same period, the total fertility rate reduced by more than four children per woman (from 6.2 to 1.9 children per woman) (Abbasi-Shavazi, McDonald and Hosseini-Chavoshi 2009). The life expectancy at birth was 62 years in the late 1980s (United Nations Development Programme 1999) but reached 70 years in 2006 (69 years for men and 72 years for women) (Population Reference Bureau 2006).

These changes have been the subject of several studies (see, e.g. Khosravi et al. 2007, Abbasi-Shavazi, McDonald and Hosseini-Chavoshi 2009, Torabi et al. 2012). But no study, to date, has applied a family life cycle approach to combine these trends in one framework to study their joint implication for the family dynamic in Iran.

A family life cycle approach generally consists in determining the timing of important stages of formation, development and dissolution of families (Glick 1989). These family cycle stages are also characterised by their roles structure, which is modified by the succession of stage (Segalen 1974). In other words, it is expected to find changes in the family role structure as wives and husbands go through different family cycle stage, e.g. by moving from childless stage to the early parental stage, or to the stage when children have departed the parental home.

Therefore, this paper aims to show socio-economic differences in the timing of major family development stages and the spouses' role behaviour as they go through successive stages.

Data

The main source of data is the 2009 Time Use Survey (TUS), representing urban areas of Iran. The data set contains information about basic socio-economic and demographic characteristics of household members and the time members aged 15 or higher spend on different activities during a typical day. The sample includes 3,220 households. (Statistical Centre of Iran 2010). Information from successive decennial Iranian censuses is also used to show changes in the timing of family development stages over time (the results are not shown here because of space limitation).

The family development stages studied here include: the pre-parental, parental and post-parental stages. The role behaviour of husband and wife is expected to considerably differ in each stage because of both changes in the family size and composition. The parental stage is categorised according to the age of children (pre-school, primary school, adolescent and adult) in order to gain the best understanding of parental role behaviour in relation to changes in children's capability in managing their needs and in assisting their parents in the family activities. These stages are identified according

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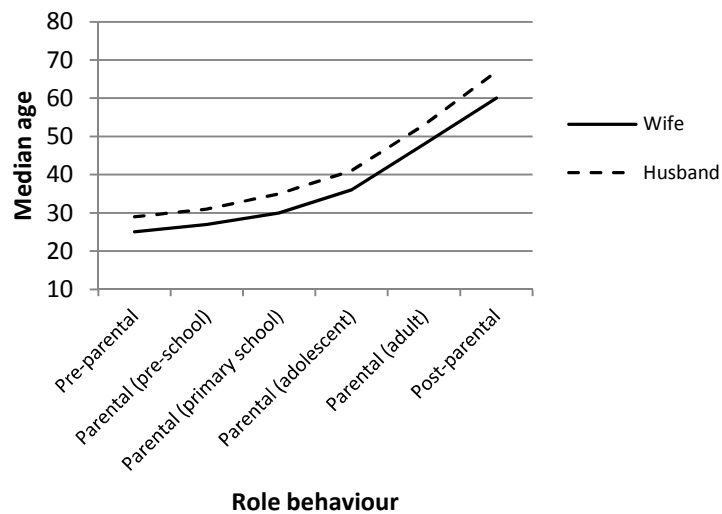
to the age of the oldest child present in the household with pre-school, primary-school, adolescent and adult stages, respectively, are represented by ages less than 6, 6-10, 11-18, more than 18 years.

The timing of each stage is shown by the median age of wives and husbands in each stage. The data does not allow us to measure the timing at each transition point. Oppong (1983) divides women's roles into seven roles: conjugal, maternal, domestic, occupational, kin, community and individual. Here, the same categorisation is applied for both wives and husbands, except the data do not allow us to measure the conjugal and kin roles.

Major (preliminary) findings

1. The timing of major family development stages: As shown in Figure 1, husbands are older than wives in each family development stage, due to the persistent earlier marriage of women in Iran. The median age is less than 30 years (wives 25 and husbands 29 years) in the pre-parental stage, reaching over 40 years (wives 40 and husbands 46 years) in the parental stage and over 60 (wives 60 and husbands 67 years) in the post-parental stage.

Figure 1 The spouses' median age at different family development stages



2. The latest transition through family development stages generally happens for wives and husbands with either no education or the highest level of education, although the extent of educational differences between wives and husbands and the pattern throughout the stages vary (see Table 1). There is not much variation in the timing of these stages by the economic status of the family, measure by the asset index quintiles (results not shown here).

Table 1 The spouses' median age at different family development stages by education

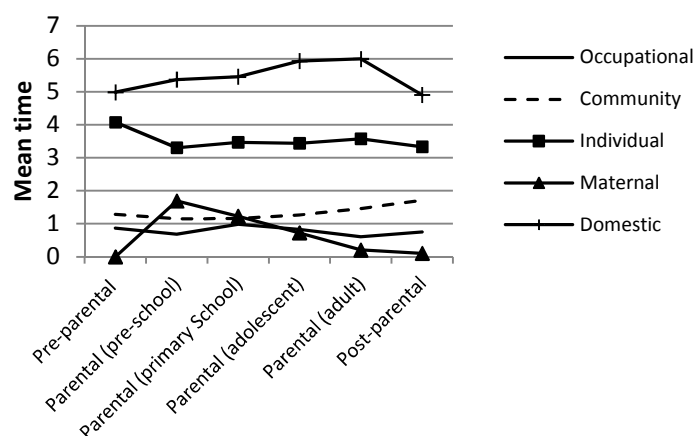
Life cycle stage	Wives					Husbands				
	No edu.	Prim.	Sec.	High	Uni.	No edu.	Prim.	Sec.	High	Uni.
Pre-parental	24	25	23	24	26	-	29	27	28	30
Parental	49	41	37	36	37	54	46	42	45	43
Pre-school	24	26	25	26	30	29	29	29	31	34
Primary	38	29	28	30	34	36	34	33	35	38
School										
Adolescent	38	36	35	34	39	45	40	41	42	42
Adult	52	47	45	46	47	57	53	50	51	52
Post-parental	65	56	49	52	44	74	67	55	61	54
Total	50	41	37	36	36	55	47	42	45	43

Note: the column heading represent, respectively, No education, primary school, secondary school, high school and university education categories.

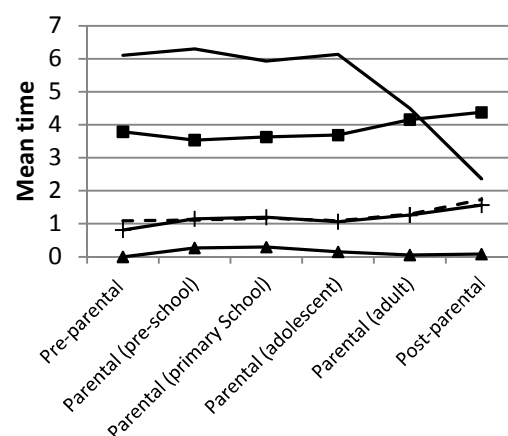
3. There are differences in the role behaviour between wives and husbands, particularly the occupational, parental and domestic roles (see Figure 2). Specifically, wives are mostly engaged in domestic activities, throughout the family development period and spend a considerable amount of time on maternal activities. Husbands are mostly engaged in occupational activities, before they reach to the final phase of the parental stage, and their engagement in the parental role in the lowest throughout the family development period. Also, the spouses' engagement in the individual and community roles is quite comparable, engagement in the community role is likely to increase towards the end of the family development for both wives and husbands and engagement in both the individual and domestic work is likely to increase towards the end of the family development only for husbands.

Figure 2 Mean time allocated to different role behaviours by family development stage

Wives



Husbands



4. The spouses' role behaviour varies by level of education (results not shown here). Specifically, wives with university education are most likely to work throughout the family development. Wives with less than high school education are generally more likely to be engaged in the community role. Highly educated wives are more likely to be engaged in the individual role, throughout the family development. The maternal role is more common among higher educated wives, particularly those with high school. Finally, the domestic role is more common among wives with no education until children reach adolescent ages and less common among wives with the highest level of education. Among husbands, the individual role is more common among those with higher education, particularly those with university education. The paternal role is mostly common among husbands with university education, and least by those with no education. Engagement in domestic activities generally increases towards the end of the parental stage and it is more common among husbands with higher education.

Also, there is no clear difference in the role behaviour by economic status of the family, except that the richest husbands are less likely to spend time on occupational activities and the richest wives are less likely to be engaged in either the maternal or the occupational roles (results not shown here).

Conclusion

The results showed that (1) the timing and the associated role behaviour of family development stages vary by the level of education for both husbands and wives, (2) the role behaviour (particularly occupational, parental and domestic roles) greatly varies between husbands and wives and (3) both the timing and the role behaviour trivially vary by the family's economic status. These results not only

contribute to the knowledge of family dynamics in Iran, but also help programme planning aimed at assisting people throughout their life course. For one example, more attention needs to be given to the existing gender inequality in the family (domestic and parental) roles and its implications for fertility trends. McDonald (2000) shows the importance of high levels of gender equality within the family to avoid very low fertility levels. Recent studies in Iran (Torabi and Abbasi-Shavazi 2012) also show a higher probability of childbearing in families where husbands are more engaged in child raising activities. Future studies are needed to describe the spouses' role expectations at each family development stage and their important correlates to provide a better understanding about gender role structures within family.

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