Analysis of the Students' Perception of Marriage in Isfahan by Introducing a Grounded Theory Model

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative approach and the grounded theory, the present study seeks to analyze the perception of marriage by the university students in Isfahan. The field of the research was the state universities in Isfahan, including Isfahan University, Isfahan University of Technology, and the Medical University of Isfahan. The participants included thirty students of various fields of study at different levels of education. They were selected through purposeful-theoretical sampling, and the required data were derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data analysis was performed by open, axial and selective coding processes and a paradigmatic model as the analytical tool. Also, the content validity of the research was evaluated with validation techniques, by an external expert, and through analytical comparisons. As the research findings indicated, university students' perception of marriage can be discussed based on the components of a paradigmatic model, including causal conditions (i.e., underlying obstacles, failure phobia, limitation assumptions, mental imaging of marriage), intervening conditions (i.e., available alternatives, marriage patterns), background conditions (i.e., variation of roles, commercialization of marriage), strategies (individual and institutional ones), consequences (psychological, affective, social and economic ones), and the core category of 'marriage as an unpredictable phenomenon'.

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Introduction

As the most fundamental human relationship and the major factor maintaining the institute of family and the stability of societies, marriage has nowadays adopted different forms under the influence of the values and developments of modernity. This metamorphosis can pose threats to family survival and social solidarity. Over the past three decades, the Iranian society has experienced fast and considerable changes in the relations between the two genders, patterns of marriage, and specific segments of the population. Some studies in the field of marriage (e.g. Delkhamoush, 2009; Askari Nodoushan et al., 2010; Abbasi Shavvazi et al., 2012; Rasouli, 2021) have shown that the Iranian society is affected by the change of values in the modern world and, thus, currently faced with certain adversities such as delayed marriage, constant celibacy, increasing rate of divorce, and cohabitation. These phenomena are serious enough to threaten the longstanding institute of family in various ways.

Social groups are exposed to modernity-induced cultural changes in different manners and at different rates (Hosseini & Geravand, 2016). For instance, the youth, especially students, are more strongly subject to attitudinal and behavioral changes in the field of marriage, which is due to their wider use of mass media, cyberspace and social networks, spread of different subcultures and lifestyles among them, and more aptitude for the change of traditional feedbacks (Sohrabzadeh & Parnian, 2016).

Over time, marriage and family patterns have undergone alterations in terms of both form and function. Indeed, perceptual developments in the context of time and place have turned marriage into a complex social phenomenon especially among young people. This transformational process consists of structurralization, disstructuralization and restructuralization stages (Sadeghi Fasaie & Erfanmanesh, 2016).

Some researchers, such as Golmorad and Saffaryan (2012) and Zain al-Dini and Vaisi Sartayereh (2023), attribute the change of marriage age to great social and economic changes. According to them, the requirements of each round of change in a society determine the conditions, mentalities and patterns

of raising a family. One of the ways of understanding such a change and predicting the trend of future developments is to qualitatively and deeply analyze the perception of those involved.

Young people have different understandings of marriage, which is due to their different cultural traits such as values, beliefs and customs as well as personal experiences, laws, political and social circumstances. Despite these differences, the empire of media in modern times and the fast and wide transmission of information have given people a level of common understanding, which is thought to be the major determinant of conditions over time.

The current situation can be understood through shedding light on the attitudes of the youth towards marriage. Thus, the questions to answer in this study are a) How is marriage understood by students?, b) What are the factors affecting their view of marriage?, c) What are the main approaches to marriage?, and d) What are the consequences of those views and approaches?

Review of the literature

The bulk of research on marriage in Iran has mainly been done since 2000. So far, the issue has been examined from legal-jurisprudential, psychological, social, economic and religious points of view. The parameters studied in this regard include the age of marriage and the factors affecting it, obstacles to marriage, criteria, values, marriage patterns of the youth, spouse-finding social networks, representations of marriage, and the methods of evaluating attitudes towards marriage.

Based on the research, the marriage-related values cherished by the young have undergone basic changes. Compared to the marriage patterns in the past, the new ones are characterized by more emotional and rational autonomy and stronger egalitarian views (Delkhamoush, 2009). Moreover, in the domains of society, family, culture and gender, 'spouse choosing values' in connection with 'generation gaps' have been found effective in creating different perceptions of marriage (Yarinasab et al., 2015; Hashemi et al., 2015). Some studies examining marriage attitudes in the past and present attribute the difference to socio-cultural factors, initial personal experiences and

observation of defective patterns, mutual awareness and acquaintance, material and nonmaterial supports, pressures exerted by marriage, parental interventions, and economic factors (Khojastamehr et al., 2017).

One of the major concepts regarding young people's perception of marriage is 'repression', which can be discussed in terms of fear, reluctance, decline of nonmaterial values, and hedonistic views. In contrast, there is the concept of 'marriage acceptance', which is directly and strongly related to religiosity (Hosseini et al., 2018; Hazrati & Nouri, 2020). In this context, one may also refer to 'delayed marriage' as another concept, which is due to being choosy or strict, engagement with one's job or education, tendency for single life, and the like (Fakhraei & Pourtaghi, 2015).

As indicated by Pike et al. (2018) & Mishchenko et al. (2023), the attitudes of young people towards marriage depend on their gender. In a study on Taiwanese students, Huang & Lin (2014) concluded that the generation gap between parents and children had led to negative views of marriage, but the boy students were less pessimistic than the girl students. Similarly, Alqashan (2010) & Li (2014) observed that the youth viewed marriage depending on the conditions in their family environment; those with conflicting or parted parents had more negative views. A study on Russian students also showed that projecting a picture of happy family to them would be a crucial method of increasing their tendency for marriage (Rostovskaya et al., 2023).

In Iran, the research conducted in the field of marriage is suggestive of certain changes in attitudes and values. On the side of the studies about the major aspects and domains of marriage, the present research focuses on how marriage is viewed by young single university students in Isfahan. To this end, a qualitative approach is practiced along with the grounded theory.

Conceptual framework of marriage

As a part of a social system, marriage and family raising patterns are affected by other social events and phenomena. The effects of social developments were first discussed by Goode (1963). As he believed, the increase of education opportunities, changes in the workforce and job activities, and urbanization are the manifestations of modernization that are of individual and social consequences, thus affecting the age of getting married.

Indeed, the universal processes of modernization, industrialization and urbanization have transformed the traditional structure of families to European styles all over the world (Mohammadi, 2013).

Based on the 'reflexive modernization' theory proposed by McDonald (2006), due to the prevalence of individualism and the expanded scope of personal choices, everyone views his future with uncertainty. Also, according to Giddens (2022), modernization leads to a kind of social distrust which, in turn, results in a sense of alienation, cosmopolitan tendencies, and increased individualism. In such circumstances, the possibility of commitment to marital bonds decreases.

In his book 'Liquid Love', Bauman (2005) addresses the roots of instability in human bonds. He explains the decline and fragility of human relationships in modern times, despite the desperate need of men and women to be related together. As he believes, the contemporary man is left alone to his own intelligence, hence feeling disappointed and easy to discard. Bauman refers to the concept of 'satisfaction' and argues despair and fragile ties are due to having no sense of satisfaction in human relationships.

The points discussed above make one convinced that the attitude of people, especially the youth, towards marriage is affected by their background and environment as well as economic, social and cultural conditions.

Methods

The present study is an interpretive paradigm conducted with a grounded theory method and a systematic approach as introduced by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 2014). This research procedure includes the stages of coding, generating a hypothesis, and deriving a logical paradigm (Creswell, 2023). It allows introducing the conditions, processes, functions and interactions involved in the studied issue (Eaman, 2012). The data required for this study were collected from 30 unmarried students at various levels of education in the state universities of Isfahan Province (Table 1).

To calculate the sample size, purposeful-theoretical sampling was performed on the basis of data saturation, the data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, and open, axial and selective coding was

done as the initial stage of data analysis. Also, the validity of the data was checked by the authors, an external expert, and analytical comparisons (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Table 1. Research participants' profile

No.	Gender	Age	University	Field of Study	Academic Level
1	Female	24	Isfahan	Mathematics	MS
2	Female	21	Isfahan	Sociology	BA
3	Male	26	Medical Sc.	Pharmacology	MD
4	Male	26	Medical Sc.	Pharmacology	MD
5	Female	20	Isfahan	History	MA
6	Female	20	Isfahan	History	MA
7	Male	19	Isfahan	Management	MA
8	Female	30	Isfahan	Nano-chemistry	MS
9	Female	24	Medical Sc.	Prosthesis	MS
10	Female	21	Medical Sc.	Anaesthesiology	BS
11	Female	30	Medical Sc.	Hyg. Education	MS
12	Female	20	Medical Sc.	Nutrition	MS
13	Female	22	Medical Sc.	Nutrition	MS
14	Female	22	Medical Sc.	Nutrition	MS
15	Female	20	Medical Sc.	Nutrition	MS
16	Female	23	Technology	Computer	BS
17	Female	23	Technology	Computer	MS
18	Female	20	Isfahan	Med. Engineering	MS
19	Male	23	Technology	Chem. Engineering	MS
20	Male	25	Medical Sc.	Medicine	MS
21	Male	22	Technology	Computer	BS
22	Male	24	Technology	Mining	BS
23	Male	27	Technology	Elec. Engineering	MS
24	Female	25	Technology	Agriculture	MS
25	Male	30	Technology	Textile Eng.	PhD
26	Male	26	Technology	Civil Eng.	MS
27	Female	30	Isfahan	Sociology	PhD
28	Male	33	Isfahan	Sociology	PhD
29	Female	25	Technology	IT	MS
30	Male	25	Medical Sc.	Medicine	MS

BA: bachelor of arts, BS: bachelor of science, MA: master of arts,
MS: master of science, MD: medical doctor, PhD: doctor of philosophy

Finding

In the first stage of the coding process, 989 open codes were extracted. From them, 38 subcategories and then 15 main categories were derived. The

core category was set to be 'marriage as an unpredictable phenomenon' (Table 2).

Table 2. Components of the paradigm, subcategories and main categories

Subcategories	Main categories	Dimensions	Core category
Individual obstacles, Sociocultural obstacles, Economic obstacles	Underlying obstacles		
Individual phobias, Fear of experiencing common failures	Fear of failure		
Individual limitations, Social limitations	Limitation assumptions	Causal conditions	
Meaning of marriage, Necessity of marriage, Reason for marriage, Appropriate age of marriage, Spouse selection criteria	Imaging of marriage		
Friendship patterns, Cohabitation	Available alternatives		
Modern pattern, Traditional pattern, Modern-traditional pattern	Marriage patterns	Intervening conditions	Marriage as an unpredictable phenomenon
Variability of roles Commercialization of marriage	Variability of roles Commercialization of marriage	Background conditions	
Self-awareness, Reconsideration	Individual solutions		
Family-based strategies, University-based strategies, School-based strategies, Media-based strategies	Institutional solutions	Approaches and strategies	
Improvement of policy making, Cultural predisposition, Economic growth	Macro solutions		

Conceptual consequences, Functional consequences	Psycho-affective consequences	
Situation enhancement, Social progress, Social health	Social consequences	Consequences
Financial independence, Economic progress	Economic consequences	

1. Causal conditions

Generally speaking, the events and happenings that lead to the occurrence or expansion of a phenomenon are referred to as causal conditions. According to the students interviewed in this study, the causal conditions that strengthen a marriage bond include underlying obstacles, multidimensional self-assessment, failure phobia, limitation assumption, and imaging of marriage.

1.1. Underlying obstacles

The underlying obstacles posed by social, cultural and economic circumstances have made students imagine marriage as something hard and backbreaking. These obstacles are of individual, socio-cultural and economy types.

Individual obstacles stem from one's personality and create a positive or negative attitude towards marriage. They are of various types such as inability to find a proper spouse, feeling of weakness in running a family, individualism and fear of losing one's privacy, bad memories of previous relations, lacking trust in others, and inability to interact with the opposite sex.

Socio-cultural obstacles are caused by the specific structure and composition of the society. They encompass a wide range of behaviors and improper family lifestyles, unregistered relations such as sex and cohabitation, excessive marriage portions, vying, seeking luxuries, cultural customs, identity crisis, and lack of communicative and marital skills.

Regarding economic obstacles, one may point to unemployment, inflation, high costs of marriage as for holding ceremonies or parties and purchasing gold, inability to rent a house, unaffordability of dowry for the boy's family, and lack of skill in managing the household economy.

A few of the comments that the interviewees made about the obstacles to marriage are presented below.

> "*Bride's portion, customs, ceremonies and luxuries can hinder marriage. I have seen all this, which may account for the postponement of my marriage. A guy was married for a year, but he had to buy gold for gift on every occasion*" (a mining boy student aged 24).

> "*I cannot easily rely on anybody. I have not found a person yet, the one who can gain the trust of me and my family*" (a prosthesis girl student aged 24).

> "*After graduation, it is so important for me to get a job that pays for my basic needs. Marriage is so demanding that it is scary to even think about it. Some guys, therefore, prefer to try easier relations*" (a civil engineering boy student aged 26).

1.2. Failure phobia

For some reasons, various factors may pile up frustration in a person's mind regarding marriage, internalizing a sort of phobia in him or her. This phobia is sometimes due to individual factors such as repeated failures in relations with the opposite sex, fear for future failure, and the conflicts between one's own parents. It is also sometimes due to general factors such as the failing marriage of others, marriage dissatisfaction of many couples, and high rate of divorce. Based on the data collected in this study, failure phobia is of two types, internalized phobia and general phobia. The following quotations point to some roots of marriage phobia:

> "*Married people's life affects the single. Their failure injects fear into the young*" (a 20-year-old girl studying history).

> "*Marriage might be avoided under the influence of one's own or others' adverse experiences*" (a chemical engineering boy student of 23).

1.3. Limitation assumption

This concept refers to the cases where people consider marriage as a limiting factor. As they assume, marriage sets limits to their individual and social life, takes their freedom away, and generally keeps them confined. Such an assumption is of individual and social domains. From the individual point

of view, it is assumed that marriage bars the fulfillment of wishes, reduces one's leisure time, brings more responsibilities, imposes behavioral changes, limits recreations, and reduces the possibility of independent decision making and risk taking. The assumed social limitations are such as restricted job activities and relationships with friends and others. The following quotations represent young people's concerns in this regard:

> "*Marriage, as a responsibility, poses certain limitations. A man has to ignore part of his leisure activities in favor of his responsibilities*" (a management boy student aged 19).

> "*Why should I consider getting married? As soon as I do, I must take permission for everything. Men interfere with their wives' affairs and try to make decisions for them*" (a girl of 19 studying agriculture).

1.4. Imaging of marriage

In the study of the marriage concept, it is important to know what image of that concept people have depicted in their minds. A positive image suggests a tendency for marriage. Despite being subjective, this mental image directly affects marriage, as an objective phenomenon. Marriage imaging is multidimensional; it can be discussed in four aspects as follows:

a. Meaning: Everybody has his own definition of marriage, which reflects his mentality and underlies his behavior. From the viewpoint of the interviewed students, the semantic features of marriage include mutual understanding, interaction, empathy, living together, mutual encouragement, complementation, and natural instincts.

b. Necessity: Different people consider marriage necessary by degrees.

c. Motivation: Regarding marriage, an individual's mentality, tendency and behavior depend on his or her motivation.

d. Criteria: To get married, people pay attention to three criteria including appearances, behavior and economic status.

The following interview extracts represent the items mentioned above:

> "*It is important to know how a person understands marriage. This helps spouses stand together in easy and hard times*" (a prosthesis girl student, aged 24).

> "*Marriage should involve encouraging each other, behaving well, and sacrificing*" (a computer girl student, aged 21).

"*Marriage is a stage of life for which everyone has his own definition and reasons*" (a medical boy student, aged 25).

2. Background conditions

Background conditions are a set of certain conditions in which the strategies for action and interaction are practiced. In the present study, the categories of 'variability of roles' and 'commercialization of marriage' are considered as the background conditions that promote marriage.

2.1. Variability of roles

In the transition from tradition to modernity, the increased education and economic participation of women bring about changes in gender roles, which affect the type of decisions to make. This issue is evident in the following quotations:

"*In the past, it was commonly assumed that women were responsible for housework and men were in charge of making money. Nowadays, however, women are economically active outdoors and expect their husbands to share the chores indoors. When getting married, I deem it so important if my husband accepts such equity*" (an IT girl student, aged 25).

"*Family and marriage are complex issues nowadays. On one hand, ladies like to have a job and be quite backed up by men. On the other hand, they don't ignore any one of their rights*" (a boy of 27 studying electrical engineering).

2.2. Commercialization of marriage

Some people and families view marriage as a commercial entity through which to secure their economic interests. They, indeed, degrade marriage down to a deal in the market. Note the quotation below:

"*Many families view marriage as a business. They think that the girl's marriage portion should be high enough so that she can get a big sum if her husband makes a slip or a divorce occurs for any reason*" (a nano-chemistry girl student, aged 30).

3. Intervening conditions

In this study, the categories of 'available alternatives' and 'marriage patterns' were identified as the intervening conditions that promote marriage.

3.1. Available alternatives

The high costs of formal marriage at financial, social and familial levels have led to various informal ways of meeting sexual desires. These alternative ways provide more freedom, impose less cost and responsibility, and bring no legal commitment. However, they are detrimental to the socially recognized custom of marriage. As an interviewee stated:

> "*Naturally, boys and girls in love affairs hardly think of marriage; that type of relation is easier than marriage*" (a boy of 27 studying electrical engineering).

3.2. Marriage patterns

In traditional societies, formal marriage is usually subject to the decision-making of families and their specific structure. In such a marriage pattern, the corresponding rules and customs are strictly implemented, and no ignorance of them is allowed. However, with further modernization of societies, economic developments, more equity of men and women's rights, and change of gender-related division of labor, there have emerged agent-based patterns of marriage marked with a decline in the traditional roles of the family and the individuals involved. In these patterns, boys and girls like to spend more time on familiarization and get married based on their own wishes. This leads to delays in marriage and a decrease in its rate. Currently, a combination of traditional and modern patterns of marriage is practiced too. Here is a relevant comment by one of the participants:

> "*I once liked traditional marriage, but I changed my mind and preferred to have it in the work or education environment. Traditional marriage is problematic. Individuals do not have enough time to know each other. They marry either on the preference of their families or on the account of some religious issues*" (a medical girl student, aged 24).

4. Approaches and strategies

To approach a phenomenon and cope with it, certain action/interaction-based strategies are needed to be adopted. As the analysis of the students' attitudes indicated, the strategies of marriage promotion are of individual, institutional and macro types.

4.1. Individual strategies

These strategies are generally the ones that need to be integrated to an individual's character so that he or she feels a tendency for marriage. The major strategies in this category are self-awareness and reconsideration. They

gain significance in a context where the young do not feel ready for marriage psychologically and emotionally. In order to get rid of this shackle, students have to achieve self-awareness and reconsider their situation through the deep and careful examination of their identity and personality as well as the whole set of their behaviors and values. To do reconsideration as an individual strategy, one should set a goal for his or her relations and direct them towards marriage. For this purpose, relations with others should not be considered merely as a leisure-time filler or a tool for the temporary satisfaction of sexual, affective and psychological needs. Besides, individuals should adjust or balance their marriage criteria based on realities rather than personal fantasies. In this regard, two of the participants stated:

> "*As I see the issue at the individual level, people need to rearrange their criteria. They might be oversensitive in a case they are not aware of*" (an agriculture girl student, aged 25).

> "*One of the solutions is to stop looking at marriage as a fantasy or a tool for mere pleasure. Pessimism should be avoided as well*" (a sociology boy student, aged 30).

4.2. Institutional strategies

Institutional strategies are those that various institutions, such as family, educational system, university and media, can present in order to promote marriage in the society. Based on the interviews conducted in the present study, family, school, university and media emerge to be the most important institutions in this regard. As for the family, it can play its promotional role by avoiding luxuries, simplifying the marriage process, eliminating unnecessary ceremonies, avoiding a business-based look at marriage, readjusting its expectations to the current social circumstances, teaching communicative skills to children, and socializing them in line with the demands of a wholesome marriage. Similarly, schools can serve to give appropriate marriage mentality, universities can offer well-grounded teachings, and media should use their advertising capabilities to give consultation and contribute to financial supports. The following opinions, extracted from the interviews, are representative:

> "*Some families stick to a set of wrong customs, excessive luxury, or idealism. Teachings are needed so as to make them realistic*" (an IT girl student, aged 25).

"*Universities can hold educational workshops and consultation sessions before marriage to deal with psychological disorders such as marriage phobia*" (an IT girl student, aged 25).

"*As I see, the first solution is the use of media. Movies and series are very effective, especially family shows*" (a sociology boy student, aged 33).

4.3. Macro strategies

These strategies are the ones that decision makers adopt at a macro level. According to the participants in this research, macro strategies include policy-making improvement, acculturation, and economic growth. In the case of policies, the interviewees referred to the reformation of marriage and divorce laws, improvement of the laws for marriage portions, revision of higher education policies, shortening of economic empowerment and job finding periods, and resolving the issue of military service for boys. Based on the opinions expressed, social and cultural atmospheres should be made more liberal in accordance with the developments in the society. Also, marriage advertisements at the macro level should be readjusted to meet the new requirements of the society. Regarding economic issues, the research participants referred to strategies such as job creation, improvement of marriage loan policies as for purchasing dowries, reduction of inflation, giving housing loans, and attempts on economic growth. These points are represented in the following quotations:

"*Economy is the main factor. If improved, it pushes people to get married. No use giving loans. They get nothing done in these circumstances. What matters to me is just economy, a good job, and stable income*" (a boy of 25 studying medicine).

"*The laws should be supportive. They tell us to get married on their lone, $150 for example. This is while a marriage ceremony takes $1500, or a dowry costs $3000. It's funny*" (a sociology girl student, aged 30).

"*Marriage path should be made predictable; that is, I like to have it programmable. Currently, fluctuations are such that no one can plan things. This feeling of insecurity pushes people from marriage*" (a computer boy student, aged 22).

5. Consequences

This section presents the consequences of implementing the abovementioned strategies. According to the students interviewed in this

study, promotion of marriage yields psychological-affective, social and economic results.

5.1. Psychological-affective results of marriage

As the participants stated, marriage brings about positive psychological and affective developments in spiritual and functional domains. Spiritually, marriage has to do with mental developments. It makes changes in one's mind and identity and gives a new meaning to life. Those who have a desirable marriage can experience a kind of psychological and emotional peace. They also achieve ascension in terms of personality and feel more consistent and efficient. Functionally, marriage is said to result in progress, sharing of attitudes, more rational decisions, reduction of confusions and common concerns, increased motivation, efforts and liveliness, more dynamism, and pleasure of childbearing. These points are somehow represented in the following interview extracts:

> "*Good marriage can fill up the emotional voids of life. It can be a jumping point from a dark and tight world to a light and wide world*" (a nano-chemistry girl student, aged 30).

> "*Good marriage can really change one's life and feelings and create a sense of rest and peace. On the other hand, an improper marriage ruins one's future, a sort of unpredictable future*" (a 20-year-old girl studying nutrition).

5.2. Social results of marriage

Despite psychological-affective consequences, which are individual in nature, the social results of marriage have to do with the society and its structure and composition. These results can be discussed in three domains including a) stability and enhancement of social status, b) social progress, and c) social health.

As the research participants stated, marriage creates new social situations followed by better social interactions and more social support. Also, by getting married, people experience more respect, acceptance and legitimacy in the society and gain better means and opportunities for their progress. Moreover, the capacity provided by marriage enables people to suppress their egoism in favor of sacrifice for others. This change of character actually results in better social and psychological wellbeing for the married. The quotations below point to the mentioned benefits of marriage:

"*One can cope with problems better through marriage owing to more relations and respect. The society has a better view of the married than the single and provides them with more resources and opportunities. To me, the married are more respectable than the single*" (a girl student of anesthesiology, aged 21).

"*Perhaps, the best advantage of marriage, as a registered legitimate relation, is the feeling of acceptability in the society*" (a 22-year-old boy studying computer sciences).

5.3. Economic results of marriage

The interviewees emphasized financial independence and economic growth as the major economic results of marriage. That is, marriage can improve one's economic status and financial independence and induce participation in making economic decisions. The emotional and psychological peace as well as the motivation experienced in 'dynamic marriage' paves the way for vocational advancement. In contrast, 'static marriage', characterized with lags in education and decline of efforts for job promotion, may deter economic progress. These points are reflected in the following viewpoints:

"*As I could see, some of my friends had little before marriage. After getting married, however, owing to their efforts in a positive atmosphere, they made a lot economically*" (a girl student of history, aged 20).

"*A married couple can have mutual economic effects, depending on the type of their relations. If there is mutual backup and empathy, the family flourishes. Otherwise, no economic growth is achieved*" (a prosthesis girl student, aged 24).

Core category: Marriage as an unpredictable phenomenon

From the viewpoint of the university students participating in this study, marriage is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It involves the four economic, cultural, social and psychological dimensions which simultaneously function at micro, medial and macro levels. Due to this complexity, the students labeled marriage as a vague and unpredictable path. However, young Iranian people still perceive marriage as something with affective, psychological and social benefits, which is a positive point for that complex entity in the current circumstances.

Before the marriage issue enters a critical stage, appropriate strategies should be adopted at micro, macro and institutional levels while taking the various corresponding challenges into account. Promotion of marriage is followed by the enhanced character and emotive-psychological feature of

individuals as well as their social status, social wellbeing, financial independence and economic growth.

Discussion & Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine how marriage was perceived by university students in Isfahan Province. As it emerged from the interviews, marriage is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon which is affected by various factors and affects other phenomena. People's perception of marriage depends on their background and the context they are in. In modern
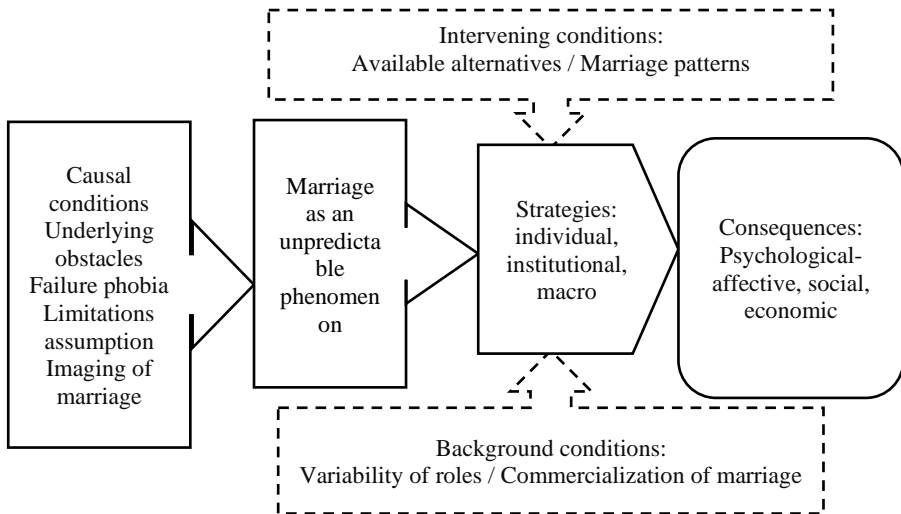

Figure 1. Paradigmatic model of the students' perception of marriage

times, the lifestyle and the marriage patterns of the past generations are considered inefficient. These findings are in line with the studies by Li (2014), Huang and Lin (2014), and Azimi Hashemi et al. (2014). As far as the university students interviewed in the present study are concerned, they have a tendency for marriage, but, due to their economic conditions, they do not feel secure about the future. This finding is consistent with the results obtained by Khojasteh Mehr et al. (2016), Hosseini et al. (2018), and Pike et al. (2018).

With regard to the structure of the society, sociocultural developments, and their own mental and psychological conditions, university students deem marriage as a liberating necessity but find it beset with various limitations. They, thus, perceive it as a non-dynamic, restrictive and trade-like custom. Some also think of that as an impassable iron wall.

The participants in this study also referred to some solutions and strategies for promoting marriage as the fundament of raising a family. All the strategies revolved around the core proposition of 'making marriage predictable at psychological, economic, cultural and family levels. Due to the multiple relationships of students' mentality with intermediate institutions and macro structures as well as the effect of that mentality on the students' decision for marriage, the measures to promote marriage are faced with serious challenges and complications. Therefore, the core concept extracted from the data in this research is 'marriage as an unpredictable phenomenon'. The correct understanding of this phenomenon and the mentality of the individuals involved helps to prioritize the adopted promotion strategies and make them more effective.

Ethical Considerations

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