

Policy Papers

Emerging Population Issues in I. R. of Iran



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Foreword

During the past few decades, Iran has experienced major socio-economic changes. These changes have brought major transition in the country's population dynamics and structure. Decrease in population growth, rapid urbanization, youth bulge, declining fertility, changes in migration patterns, gradual increase in the proportion of the elderly, and finally increase in the proportion of the female-headed households are among these population transitions. Although, all these transitions are in fact influenced by the overall socio-economic changes, nevertheless, their mutual effects on the overall structure are undeniable.

The joint program of UNFPA and the University of Tehran during 2012-2016, set out to identify and analyze a number of these crucial demographic trends and processes which were undergoing drastic changes. The outcome of the analysis were four comprehensive reports addressing internal migration and urbanization patterns and trends, population ageing, youth, as well as female-headed households, all of which were prepared according to the current situation and policy recommendations.

The present report is comprised of four policy papers and intends to outline and formulate policy recommendations which are related to the aforementioned topics, aiming to assist policy making in the fields related to population, and to provide sound evidence for policy formulation and planning.

To achieve this goal, sincere cooperation of many individuals was required. First, we would like to thank the authors of these articles, particularly Prof. Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi for his initiation and overall supervision. Also, invaluable and earnest support of our colleagues at UNFPA Iran, Ms. Soudabeh Ahmadzadeh (Assistant Representative), and Mr. Kambiz Kabiri (Programme Analyst) call for particular gratitude. We would also like to thank Ms. Mehrnaz Soleymanlou for her diligent assistance all through the work. We are also grateful to our colleagues in the Department of Demography at University of Tehran, whose thorough recommendations and guidance proved to be extremely productive.

Dr. Hossein Mahmoudian
UNFPA National Program Director

Dr. Maha El-Adawy
UNFPA Representative

THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE POPULATION POLICIES IN IRAN

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi¹
Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi²

Executive Summary

Iran has experienced remarkable population changes during the past three decades. The population growth has declined from about 3.9% during 1976-86 to 1.3% during the period 2006 and 2011, and the total fertility rate in between the two periods has decreased from 7.0 children to below-replacement-level (1.8 children) in 2011. Changes in fertility and mortality rates, and accordingly population growth have caused a dense youth population structure in post-revolutionary Iran, which will lead to transition to middle age and old age in the next decades. All these conditions have paved the ground for the tailoring and modification of population policies in Iran. Nevertheless, despite all the attention paid to the aforementioned status in recent years, no comprehensive population document is provided on which demographers, economists, and other experts could reach a consensus. This, in turn, has brought forward non-scientific reports about past trends, as well as present and future situations in the country. Most of such reports generally indicate crises resulting from a massive fall of fertility, negative rate of population growth, and high rates of aging in the near future. In order to avoid from such crises, impetuous strategies and quick-fix policies such as “Aatiyeh Plan” or eliminating family planning programs have been proposed to motivate couples to have more children. Fortunately, guidance on the Population Decree by His Eminence the Supreme Leader, April 2014, provided the outlines and strategies for formulation of general population policies for the country. Reviewing the past population trends and providing the evidence on the necessity of population policy change in the country, the present paper emphasizes on preparation of comprehensive population document by demographers and population experts, based on which the implementation plans for executing country’s population policies can be devised and approved.

1-Professor of Demography, University of Tehran, Director, National Institute of Population Research, and Senior Fellow, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University. mabbasi@ut.ac.ir

2-Research Associate, The Australian National University and Ex-Senior Expert at the Iran Ministry of Health, and Medical Education. meimanat.hosseini@anu.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced profound demographic changes during the past three decades; changes which have had tremendous effects on the growth and composition of the population of the country, and will continue to impact its structure in future. Population policies and hence socio-economic development plans of the country must be devised on the basis of past demographic changes, present conditions, and possible transitions in the future. The fact that high ranking authorities of the country are devoting exclusive attention to the need for modifying the country's population policies is of crucial importance, and valuable results will be gained if the new policies are correctly planned and executed. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that any change or modification in population policies and future planning calls for extensive professional and comprehensive population studies. In recent years, despite all the attention paid to the issue of population, there is lack of a single inclusive and comprehensive document about population, prepared by a professional committee of experts, which includes demographers, sociologists, economists, and health experts. This, in turn, has given grounds to novice debates and theories regarding past, present, and future trends of population, creating angst among the authorities about the future of population. In the absence of such a comprehensive document and road map for the amelioration of the present population status, unprofessional and haphazard policies have been proposed and implemented in order to circumnavigate the critical population conditions. Keeping the current situation will result in lending credence to and execution of inconsistent and discordant population policies; which will, in turn, will not bring about the expected results despite spending ample time and resources.

In order to devise comprehensive and sustainable population policies for the country, the present policy paper intends to investigate and evaluate the population changes and proposed hypotheses regarding the process of population growth and structure. In addition, recommendations will be made to the institutions involved in population policy making to collaborate in designing sustainable and fea-

sible population policies for the country.

POPULATION TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The number, growth, and structure of population are three fundamental and inter-related variables which are taken into consideration in any population development planning. Dealing with "number" without taking "growth" or "structure" into consideration can hardly provide a clear insight into the current situation, or the future of the population. Natural population growth is the result of changes in fertility and mortality rates. While migration can also play a major role in the increase or decrease of a population, the rate of population growth in Iran during the past four decades has been influenced by the decrease in mortality rate and reduction of fertility. The total fertility rate (the number of children born to a woman during her reproductive period) decreased from 7.0 children in 1981, to replacement-level (2.1 children) in 2001, (Abbasi-Shavazi, et al, 2009), and in 2011, the average number of children per woman stands around 1.8 children (Abbasi-Shavazi & Hosseini-Chavoshi, 2013). Also, the average rate of population growth has decreased from 3.9% between 1976-86, to 1.3% during 2006-2011. The stages of Iran's demographic transition have affected the age structure of the population leading to a young age structure for the past few decades. However, the percentage of the young population (those aged between 15-29 years old) reached its maximum by the end of 2001 and started to decrease from 2011.

The decline of population growth rate as well as changes in population age structure in recent years have paved the way for a change in population policies, and in meeting this challenge, the Islamic Republic of Iran has moved forward in this direction. However, there is still no comprehensive report available regarding the status of population, nor a proper understanding of the causes and consequences of the population change. In recent years, indications have mainly been made to the massive fall of fertility, falling total fertility rates to below-replacement level, reaching negative population growth in near future, and the impending aging of the population. The fundamental solution that has been proposed to

overcome these problems has been the promotion of a pronatalist policy and discontinuation of family planning programs. Such a viewpoint has certainly ignored the inclusiveness and complexity of population issues leading to one-sided and uncoordinated suggestions being proposed. This paper will review the findings of research on such issues as fertility trends and population aging to provide suggestions for devising sustainable policies in the country.

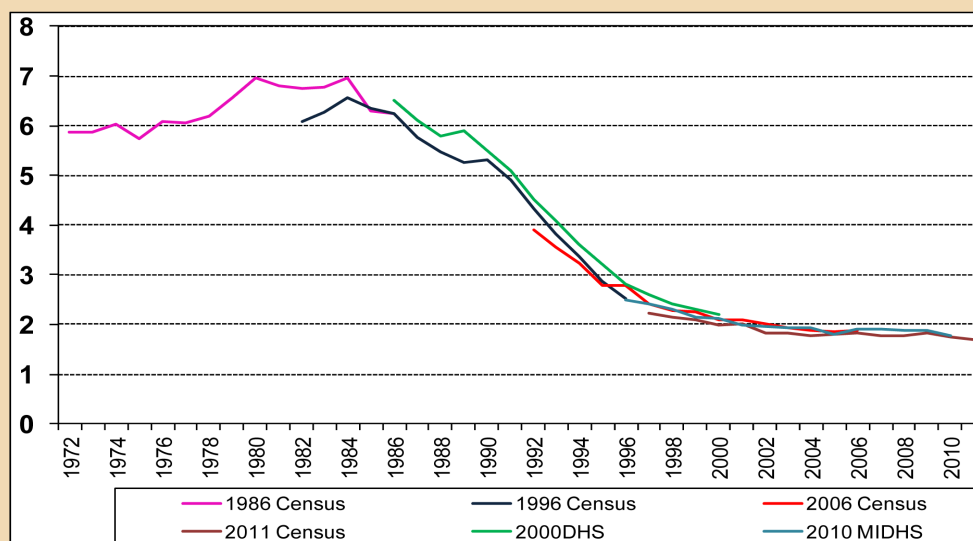
PAST AND FUTURE TRENDS OF FERTILITY

The recent change in population policies has been based on the assumption that fertility rates have been decreasing dramatically, and it has been suggested that the reduction of fertility, as experienced in 1990s, will continue to decrease into the future. Below-replacement fertility has been emphasized more than anything else, and the total fertility rate in Iran in 2011 has been estimated to be far too low, i.e. around 1.5-1.6 children. In addition, with reference to cross-sectional (period) studies and based on sample surveys in certain regions of the country, generalizations have been made on an increase in the number of “childless”, and “single child” couples. Thus, deep concern has been expressed on very low levels of fertility in the country. Available evidence, however, indicates that the trend of fertility

has been relatively stable in recent years, and the level of fertility is presently not very low. Moreover, the current trend can actually sustain a positive population growth in future.

Analyzing fertility trends using the 2011 census (Figure 1) reveals that although the fertility rate has reached below-replacement level, the reduction of fertility has slowed down and has been relatively stable around 1.8 children in the current decade (Abbasi-Shavazi & Hosseini-Chavoshi, 2013). Moreover, estimates of fertility, using the data obtained from the Iran Demographic Health Surveys of the Iran Ministry of Health, and applying Parity Progression Ratio Method both indicate that the fertility rates in 2010 have been slightly higher than two children. Further review of women’s birth history in the same study also indicates that 70% of Iranian women had two or more children by the end of their reproductive age, and less than one-third of women had the probability of having less than two children. (For further information regarding levels of fertility in recent years see: Abbasi-Shavazi & Hosseini-Chavoshi, 2014, and Hosseini-Chavoshi, McDonald, and Abbasi-Shavazi, 2013).

Figure 1. Total fertility rate in Iran from 1972 to 2010, based on National censuses and Demographic and Health Surveys



Source : Abbasi-Shavazi & Hosseini-Chavoshi, 2013

Overall, regarding the trends of fertility in recent years and considering the pattern of childbearing, fertility is not very low and there is no sign of fertility crisis in Iran as yet. However, employing evidence-based, effective, and sustainable policies in order to increase fertility towards replacement level, and preventing further decrease in fertility is deemed necessary.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES OF FERTILITY

High fertility in border provinces of the country has led to the assumption that sustained high fertility in certain provinces may lead to regional population imbalance. Although fertility levels have been diverse in different provinces of the country during the past three decades, studies of fertility trends have shown that border provinces, like most other provinces, have experienced a fall in fertility. For instance, in early 1980s, fertility level in Sistan and Baluchistan was around 9.3 children, and in 2011 it fell to around 3.5 children. In other words, during that period, fertility in Sistan and Baluchistan had decreased by 5.8 children. Similar reductions have taken place in other provinces such as Hormozgan, Ilam, Bushehr, Kurdistan, and West Azerbaijan. In addition, studies of fertility in various provinces indicate a negative relationship between level of socioeconomic development and fertility. Therefore, high fertility rates in Sistan and Baluchistan, as the most deprived province of the country is not entirely unexpected. For instance, below-replacement level fertility in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan provinces is indicative of the impact of socio-economic development, accessibility to health and welfare services, and literacy level of women in these regions on the fertility rates in these regions. In order to investigate the degree of the effect of high fertility in certain provinces on population at the national level, the weight of population of these provinces must be taken into consideration. As an example, it should be investigated to see what percentage of the population has more than two children, and what percentage has more than three children. Given the low percentage of population in provinces with high fertility (i.e. above three children), changes in population composition of the country and the possibility of population imbalance will be extremely low

and trivial. It must be noted that continuation of development plans in provinces with high fertility will result in a decline in fertility rates, and existing differences in fertility between different groups will be reduced to minimum levels. Fertility differentials in any country and region will be maintained and shall not be disappeared. In other words, fertility level in the country is the sum of fertility rates at province level, and therefore, the implementation of regional policies to reach similar fertility levels seems implausible.

CHANGES IN THE AGE STRUCTURE OF POPULATION

Reduction of mortality and fertility rates, as well as socioeconomic development have made the transition of population structure -from young to aged- is inevitable in all developed and some developing countries. In Iran, too, an increase in birth rates in the 1980s has led to changes in age structure of population and its youthfulness. Naturally, this young population will enter into middle age and aging years, and before long the proportion of 65-year-old population will increase, leading to an ageing population. Changes in age structure of a population call for employment of appropriate policies for that structure and its priorities, as age structure brings about conditions which may be followed by opportunities and challenges. Consideration of population opportunities is fundamental to population policies. In recent years, more attention has been paid to the ageing of the population, rather than emphasizing its young structure, and one of the main reasons for the change of population policies is claimed to be neutralizing the crisis of aging.

Although prudence and exertion of target-oriented policies to face ageing of the population seem essential, nevertheless, a realistic and logical attitude is called for in order to employ policies tailored for the current youthful structure of the population, and its future ageing structure. Figure 2 shows the percentage of Iran's population distribution based on four population groups, according to censuses carried out from 1976 to 2011, as well as a projection for 2021. The four groups include: under 15 (children), and 65 and older (aged) as the inactive population or the dependents,

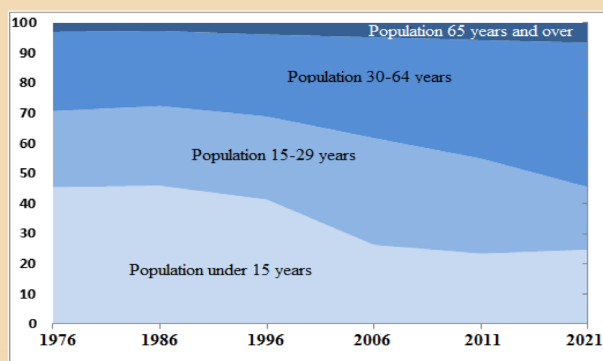
and two groups including 15-29 (young), and 30-64 (middle-aged) as the active population. The ratio of the two latter groups to the total population is of crucial importance for every country, from the standpoint of political and socio-economic developments.

The young, aged between 15-29 years old, must be recognized by policy makers in development programs as a group which requires exclusive attention in the areas of higher education, job market, marriage, and national and political security. The middle-aged, includes those aged 30-64 years old, who are potentially active in socio-economic, management

and the aged people will still be active and effective at higher ages, and against the general held view, they will no longer be dependents and inactive. For instance, aging countries such as Japan and Germany have had the highest per capita gross national income for some years. Although population polices must take the total population structure into consideration and make plans for the elderly too, the current status of the population calls for prioritizing the youth and their problems such as education, employment, and most importantly, their marriage and childbearing. If the conditions are made favorable for today's young

to be active and productive, they will invest for their old age as well. Unfortunately, the ill-conceived and haphazard plan for population aging has led to the neglect of the golden opportunity of demographic window, and instead of planning a comprehensive program appropriate for the current age structure in Iran which utilizes the exceptional demographic resources of the country, all attention is focused on the concerns over accelerated aging of the population in future.

Figure 2. Trend of population distribution of four age groups in Iran's total population during 1976-2011, and its forecast for 2021



Source: Various Census data. Projections made by the authors.

and planning areas, and play a major role in development and investment plans. Due attention to the trends of each of these groups should be one of the main components of population policy and planning.

Over 70% of the population is currently in the active age group (15-64). This is interpreted as a demographic window, or the golden opportunity for the economic development of the country. In other words, the ratio of active individuals is greater than the sum of individuals under 15 and over 65, namely referred to as the dependents. This golden opportunity may last for the next two or three decades, and may never happen again (Sadeghi, 2012; Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2014). In addition, according to the 2011 census, only 6% of the population were over 65 years old (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2013) and the number is expected to rise to 7% in 2021, and to 15% in 2046, in 30 years' time. It has to be taken into consideration that with a rise in life expectancy and health improvements, aging indices will also change (Sanderson & Sherbov, 2005, 2010),

PROJECTION OF IRAN'S POPULATION

Iran's population has increased more than seven times during the 20th century, and population growth has been accompanied by fluctuations. Population growth has been reduced to 1.3 percent during the years 2006-2011, as compared to 3.9 percent during 1976-1986. The reduction of population in the 1990s has been due to simultaneous reduction of mortality, particularly infant mortality rates, and fertility rates, while the slow growth of population during 2001-2011 has been more or less due to a drop in fertility rates. Continuation of decline of population growth along with low levels of fertility, as well as a possible increase of mortality (due to population aging) may lead to a negative growth in the long run; and the goal of population policies must therefore target an increase or continuation of current level of fertility to ensure positive growth of population. However, emphasis and focus on population growth without taking structure and quality of the population into consideration can

bring about misunderstanding about future of population which may lead to one-sided and impetuous policies.

It must be noted that first, despite its slow rate of growth in recent years, the Iranian population is still young and a high percentage of the population are in reproductive ages, and it is highly possible that these individuals will marry and will have at least around two children. This, by itself, can guarantee positive population growth. Statistics provided by the Civil Registration Office shows that in recent years around 1,400,000 births are annually added to the population, and that there has even been an increase in birth rates in recent years. Second, low levels of population growth in the decades to come does not necessarily mean that there will be no population growth, or that the population will rapidly decrease; rather it may take decades for a population to have a negative growth, even with a growth rate of about half a percent. Therefore, it does not seem logical to be concerned about the negative growth of population in the near future, and there is no need to adopt and implement ill-conceived policies. Nevertheless, following the compilation of a comprehensive population document, policies and plans must be employed in order to sustain the positive growth of the population and to ensure possible achievement of replacement level fertility in the country.

IMPACTS OF FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS ON POPULATION GROWTH

One of the reasons for fertility decline in Iran was the implementation of family planning programs during 1990s. Nevertheless, the main reason for the success of these programs must be sought within the socio-cultural and health developments in post-revolutionary Iran through which deprived regions and rural areas of the country benefited from infrastructure facility development, and proper levels of health care. The outcome of improvements in health conditions and promotion of development levels was a decrease in infant mortality rates, followed by a decrease in the demand for children. Under such circumstances, family planning programs and the supply of contraceptives with the aim of promoting maternal and child health care, paved the way for

couples to control and plan their childbearing. Rapid urbanization and changing urban life styles along with economic insecurity and increasing trend of living expenses and housing plus the availability of family planning services all led to a fall of fertility rate in the last two decades. Obviously, the objectives of past family planning programs are not responsive to the current needs of the society; but this does not mean family planning programs must be completely dismantled in the country. Family planning programs must be revised with the aim of improving the well-being of families and society taking the recent population conditions into consideration. More than two-thirds of Iranian women do not wish to have another child, once they pass the age of 35. This conforms to the health recommendations of the Maternal Health Programme, concerning the high risk of pregnancies under the age of 18, and above 35. According to recent research (Hosseini-Chavoshi, et al, 2013), there is an age gap of 18 years between the first and last child of mothers who had married in the 1960s, but in the case of those who married in 1990s, only 8 or 9 years of their life was devoted to childbearing. An important point is that the reproductive lifespan of Iranian women has been reduced. However, this does not necessarily imply that by family planning programs should be suspended. In fact, by providing appropriate family planning services and correct teaching, it would be possible to motivate couples to have more children and provide them proper choices to plan their childbearing with logical birth spacing between their desired numbers of children. Moreover, family planning is a must for more than one third of women who already have three or more children, and have no intentions to have more children. Many women prefer to control or even terminate their fertility in their late 30s, and their need for family planning cannot be ignored. There is a direct relationship between a woman's age and her decision to use a certain method of birth control, and this is the case in almost every society. The findings of the 2010 IDHS, conducted by the Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, indicate that the pattern of contraceptive use change by increase in women's age. The lowest rate of contraceptive use is observed among married

women under 20 years of age. This patterns shifts toward towards safer and reversible methods among women aged 20-29 years of age. For instance, taking IUD, injections, and/or pills is higher in the 25-29 age group. Lower rates of resorting to traditional methods, or tubaligation observed among younger women indicates that the majority of Iranian women under 30 apply birth control methods to plan their fertility as well as birth spacing, while women who are 30 years old or older, tend to stop their childbearing. (Appendix Table 1).

Fortunately, the prevalence of using long term methods such as tubaligation among women aged 15-29 is very low, and is mostly seen among those who already have their desired number of children and are over 30 years of age. Also, higher rates of resorting to permanent methods of sterilization, such as tubaligation, among older women particularly in rural areas, is due to having higher number of children. It is interesting to note that a remarkable percentage of women in urban areas preferred traditional methods (mostly withdrawal method known as coitus interrupts) in order to plan their reproduction, and surprisingly had lower fertility rates than women in rural areas. In other words, couples' intention to plan their fertility is as effective as the accessibility of family planning services in reducing or increasing fertility.

In recent years, some authorities have insisted on limitation or even suspension of family planning services, only by emphasizing the impacts of family planning programs on reduction of fertility. The proposal for setting up punishments for those who provide male and female sterilization services is based on such a viewpoint. The findings presented in Appendix Table 1 show how serious Iranian couples are in planning their childbearing, and it seems necessary to continue to provide family planning services particularly for young couples. Slashing such services will have dire consequences such as unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions, the irreparable consequences of which on women's health as well as the society cannot be overlooked.

Iranian families regard marriage as an Islamic-Iranian tradition, and have faith in it. Although in Iran, family expectations, and the married couples' tendencies favour having children, yet most young couples prefer to postpone

having children until after they have a stable family life, and proper financial and economic conditions. Providing family planning service facilitates marriage and reproduction for young couples (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2010). In fact, reassessment of family planning policies, and continuation of services in a well-planned pattern and framework will not only result in preventing further reduction of fertility, but also can help sustaining fertility rates at an ideal level in accordance with other developmental policies. Revision and modification of population policies does not mean suspension of family planning programs and services, rather providing such services in the correct manner and promoting safe delivery must be prioritized in the agenda of the Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

POPULATION POLICIES MATCHING THE IRAN'S SITUATION

Population policies refer to a host of measures and strategies employed and executed by governments in order to improve the quality of life, development, improvement of population indices, and sustainability of population growth. The key to success of such policies lies in a clear and precise understanding of population situation, and in comprehensiveness and sustainability of these policies. Intersectional collaboration and harmony, economic conditions, the budget allocated for enforcing the execution of these policies as well as public support are the prerequisites for the success of population policies. As the results of population policies are usually achieved in the long run, preparation, approval, and the implementation of these policies must be performed with outmost care and thoughtfulness; and hasty decision makings, and biased views must be avoided. The question is what the available population policy options are, and which ones match the population situation of the country? In recent years, policy-makers and high ranking authorities of Islamic Republic of Iran have shown concern about issues related to population, and the necessity for the revision of population policies. As mentioned earlier in the present paper, various theories have been presented on the sharp fall of fertility, negative population growth, and rapid aging of the population. To manage the population from the crisis situation outlined in these arguments, the

authorities have considered a shift to pronatalist policies. To implement these plans, the draft of the general population plan and exaltation of family law has been prepared by the Islamic Parliament (Majlis), and the preliminary draft has been reviewed by the Health, Social and Cultural Commissions of the parliament. The final version of the law is ready to be ratified in an open session (Islamic Parliament, 2013). The final draft, prepared by the Cultural Commission of the parliament, includes 54 articles. An overall review of the articles of the plan shows that the draft is based on such assumptions as a sharp fertility decline, and a negative population growth in the near future, the accuracy of which was investigated in the present paper. Also, the main objective of the plan is to increase fertility to around 2.5 children, and various incentives have been envisioned for achieving this objective.

Preparing this draft is highly valued and has provided a ground for debates and investigation of population policies among policy makers and the experts. It should be mentioned, however, that the initial draft still calls for clarifications, and it may take months or even years to implement some of the policies and to achieve its objectives. One of the main shortcomings of this plan is that the economic evaluation for administering the plan and its articles has not yet been clarified, while carrying out some of the tenors of the plan requires an enormous budget. As declared by the head of the Cultural commission of the parliament, implementing the plan will require a budget of around IRR70,000,000,000,000. Considering all the current economic problems of the country, and the time needed to ameliorate this situation, the question is whether the government will have the sufficient financial resources to successfully implement the plan and its scheduled objectives. Another point is that the overall focus of this plan is on the negative population growth, and low fertility rates in the country, whereas quality aspects of the population of the country that have been included in the Population Decree by His Eminence the Supreme Leader as well as the reasons and context of low fertility are not taken into consideration. Unlike the title of the plan, the required 'comprehensiveness' is missing from its content, and even after its ratification, it cannot be expected to solve various issues relat-

ed to population, or even to achieve its major and fundamental objective which is increasing fertility. It goes without saying that successful implementation of the proposed population policies calls for a tremendous cooperation and coordination of numerous organizations without which the whole project will go under question; or under optimistic circumstances, it will surely be limited. Despite collaborations of relevant authorities, there is no consensus or common understanding of the issues related to population, or of the strategies to unravel them. So far, the experts of the Population Association of Iran have expressed their professional viewpoints about the un-professional comments regarding population in various meetings and through media and press and have presented their criticisms about the plan as well. Most experts have raised their concerns that implementation of quick-fix plans and periodic policies will not bring about successful outcomes, rather it will make it extremely costly and even impossible to achieve the objectives of the plan. Fortunately, Population Decree revealed by His Eminence the Supreme Leader in May 2014, have entirely dealt with the issue of population, providing the grounds for formulating the comprehensive population policies. The Population Decree illustrates an accurate understanding of the multi-faceted issue of population and the need to compose such policies. The Population Decree is comprised of 14 articles, and among the various population facets dealt with in, are: achieving fertility rate at replacement level or higher, facilitating and promoting family formation and childbearing, providing proper means to help mothers especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding, consolidating the basis and stability of family, promoting and establishing Islamic-Iranian life style, promoting life expectancy, providing for family health and nutrition, promoting the culture of respecting and endearing the older people, and providing the necessary conditions for taking care of them at home, empowering the population at working age through cultural reforms, reinforcing and adapting disciplinary systems and public training, spatial and geographical distribution of population corresponding to ecologic capacity, emphasizing supplying water with the objective of reducing population density as well as a balanced distribution, at-

tracting and keeping the population in villages, border-zones, and sparsely populated regions, establishing new population centers, managing migration, motivating Iranians living abroad to return and/or invest inside Iran, constantly observing the qualitative and quantitative aspects of population policies by providing the proper mechanisms and local factors of human development, and finally performing research on population and human development. A crucial point to consider is that the Population Decree is not summarized merely in increasing population, and various aspects of population, in particular the quality of population has also been taken into consideration.

It goes without saying that these are general policies and fulfilling them requires tact, deliberate, professional endeavor, and time to study and present supporting strategies and laws. Passing a law without taking its executive possibilities into account can hardly be effective; a case in point is that the passage of the 2006 marriage law, or announcing the "Prospect [Atiyeh] Plan", did not have the slightest effect on increasing fertility. A review of the overall law of population and family exultation shows that this law only covers three aspects of the 14 articles of the general policies which were officially notified, and the rest are left untouched. It is, therefore, suggested that the Population Decree be taken as the foundation and basis for the verification and formulation of executive policies of population. Given that the responsibility of fulfilling the objectives and policies included in this law lies with the government, no doubt knowledge and awareness of its short and long term financial and administrative loads is absolutely necessary. In order to finalize the population policies, it is suggested that: First, the esteemed government and the parliament reconsider and review the plan in the parliament at a proper time with more interaction and deliberation. Second, passing laws and enforcing unevaluated, unfocused, and short-term policies will certainly have no effects on increasing fertility and population. Therefore, a national scientific committee must first be organized, including eminent authorities in the fields of Demography, Economics, health and medical sciences, management and planning, and theology, who will be responsible for drafting

a comprehensive report about population and the necessary policies. Then, the report must be analyzed and evaluated by the experts and representatives of the parliament, and the final draft, along with the suggested reforms must be formulated as the Comprehensive Population Policy. After reaching a consensus and agreement over the document, and the revision of the plan, assessment of its financial load, and the effects of each of its articles, it can then be passed and executed. Third, the opinions and viewpoints of couples and people must always be taken into account, because passing and executing a law without people's viewpoints –in particular, the youth- and without considering their problems, will render the plan a failure. Fourth, to achieve the goals of the plan, instead of dismantling family planning programs completely or penalizing male and female sterilization methods, actions must be taken to present correct reproductive health services, and ameliorate families' awareness regarding safe delivery and the consequences of permanent contraception as the main objective of reviewing the plan. Finally, although population policies must be appropriated with the demographic structure, and cultural and socio-economic status of each country, there are similarities and common points between countries with low fertility that have adopted appropriate pronatalist policies. Therefore, it is essential to take advantage of the experiences of countries with similar demographic and socioeconomic status to our country. Applying the successful experiences from these countries will ensure that resources and budget are used properly, and that failed policies elsewhere are not re-designed and re-implemented.

Appendix Table 1, Percentage of Married Women Using contraceptives – the 2010 Iran DHS

Region	Age	All methods	Permanent methods (Sterilization)		Temporary modern methods			Condom	Traditional methods
			Female	male	IUD	DMPA	Pill		
Rural Areas	<20	32.3	0	0	2.7	1.2	15.9	3.4	9.1
	20-24	55.3	0.2	0.2	8	5.2	26.4	4.1	11
	25-29	68.1	5.1	0.6	9	6.9	29.5	5	12
	30+	75.7	32.2	2.1	3.9	5.8	18.7	2.8	10.1
Urban Areas	<20	41.5	0.1	0	5.5	0.7	13.1	6.1	16
	20-24	64.4	0.3	0.5	12.6	1.7	19.7	7	22.6
	25-29	77.9	3	1.3	15.6	2.1	23.4	8.1	24.4
	30+	83.3	25.5	5.1	8.1	1.1	14.2	7.1	22.1
Total	<20	37.4	0.1	0	4.2	0.9	14.4	4.9	12.9
	20-24	60.9	0.3	0.4	10.8	3.1	22.3	5.9	18.1
	25-29	74.3	3.7	1	13.2	3.8	25.6	7	20
	30+	80.7	27.8	4.1	6.7	2.7	15.7	5.7	18.1

Source: Calculated using the 2010 IDHS data

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THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF YOUTH BULGE IN IRAN

Rasoul Sadeghi¹

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi²

ABSTRACT

In recent years, Iran has been faced with the phenomenon of youth bulge. Currently around one third of the population is composed of youth aged 15-29. The youth bulge is not only of important in terms of population weight but also in its economic, social and political aspects. Given the potential advantages and benefits of youth bulge, demographers consider such a population structure a 'demographic window' or 'opportunity'. In order to activate such a potential source, proper knowledge and understanding of the features and qualities of this population is needed in the first place. Secondly, appropriate policies and programs are needed to make the best of such an opportunity. The objective of this article is to provide a picture of the Iranian population aged 15-29 from demographic, health, economic, social and cultural perspectives while critically reviewing related policies and programs. In other words, this paper looks into the requirements for the development and implementation of appropriate comprehensive plans and policies which benefit from the opportunities, and counter the challenges of the population youth. The findings of this article indicated that youth bulge is a time of both opportunity and risk. In fact, youth bulge could be a golden opportunity for a country's sustainable development and at the same time the origin of many political, social and economic problems. This paradoxical situation of opportunity and risk highlights the necessity of a comprehensive and precise understanding of all various aspects of youth's situation and appropriate policy-making. Finally, the article recommends the development of a comprehensive policy for youth and its successful implementation.

1-Assistant Professor of Demography, University of Tehran. rassadeghi@ut.ac.ir

2- Professor of Demography, University of Tehran, Director, National Institute of Population Research, and Senior Fellow, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University. mabbasi@ut.ac.ir

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been faced with the phenomenon of youth bulge. Currently around one third of the population is composed of youth aged 15-29. Increase in the number and proportion of young people is a unique phenomenon in the socio-demographic history of Iran. Moreover, population changes have been concurrent with social, economic, political and cultural changes. Compared to other life cycles, young periodian era of multiple transitions, indicating "a dense period of demographic events" (Rendfuss, 1991) and social transitions (Xenos and Kabamalan 1998).

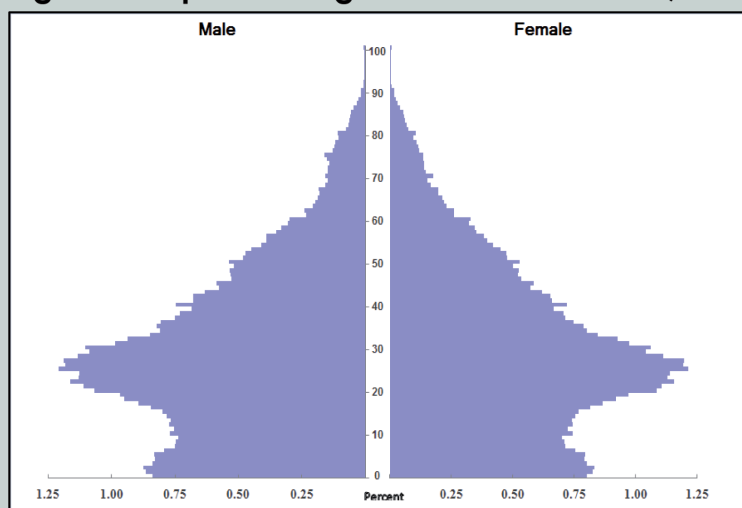
Thus, youth bulge in Iran is not only of important because of its population weight, but is also worth noting in terms of economic, social and political aspects. In fact, young population has increased compared to the total population of the country both in number and in terms of quality (literacy, urbanization, availability and use of mass media). Nowadays, the young population of the country enjoys developmental features such as higher education, empowerment and skills, which can be productive.

Considering the benefits and potential advantages of this population transition, demographers call such population

structure a 'demographic window' or 'opportunity' and economists refer to it as 'demographic dividend'. In order to realize this potential asset, it is necessary to first develop our understanding of the attributes and added-values of this population, and secondly, implement comprehensive policies and programs needed to make the best of such an opportunity.

Iran's population policies have so far been mostly focused on population growth rather than the age structure transitions

Figure 1. Population Age Structure of I.R. Iran, 2011



Source: Calculated based on the 2011 Census.

During the young period that most changes and transitions of life such as entering and graduating from university, entering the labor market, transition to adulthood, marriage

In recent years, Iran has been faced the phenomenon of youth bulge. Currently around one third of the population is made up of youth aged 15-29. The youth bulge is not only important in terms of its population weight but also in economic, social and political aspects.

and family formation, parental experiences, divorce, high-risk behaviors, migration, etc... take place. The density and intensity of these events along with quick and amazing technological advancements have turned young people into engine of social change.

and its various phases including youth bulge. As yet, the academic community, decision-makers and organizations related to youth affairs have not realistically and comprehensively studied this population. Thus, understanding all socio-demographic aspects of the youth in a scientific and multi-dimensional manner is a necessity both from the academic point of view and in terms of policy formulation. This article seeks to provide a picture of the socio-economic, demographic and health status of youth aged 15-29 in Iran. It intends to critically review the youth related programs and policies and look into the political implications of developing and implementing appropriate and comprehensive policies and programs in order to benefit from the opportunities and counter those challenges related to youth.

2. YOUTH BULGE AND EMERGING DEMOGRAPHIC WINDOW

In the context of age structure transitions, a period of demographic changes has started in the first decade of this century called “youth bulge”. The outstanding feature of this period is the significant rise in the number and percentage of the young population. As can be seen in Figure 1, Iran is in the youth bulge phase. Currently around one third of the population is composed of youth aged 15-29.

With such youth bulge, a phase of population dynamics has begun in the country referred to “demographic window”.

In the demographic window phase, the volume and ratio of the economically active population (aged 15-64) increases and reaches its peak. This phase is a temporary situation in the population structure of the country.

Iran's demographic window began in 2005 and is predicted to remain open for another four decades. From the year 2051 onwards, with the increase in the older population this window will gradually close (Figure 2). The mechanisms of demographic window such as increase in the labor force, increase labour participation of women, reduce dependency ratio, interactions between changes in the population's age structure and the production and consumption life cycles, increase saving and investment power, improve and develop human capital, increase population quality and so on, all provide an exceptional and golden opportunity for economic growth and development in the country.

Hence, the demographic window is a golden opportunity for development. Of course, it doesn't work automatically, benefiting from this demographic gift requires an appropriate socio-economic, institutional and political contexts. Making good use of demographic win-

dow and turning it into an economic and social opportunity requires empowerment of the youth, developing employment opportunities, proper investment, improved quality of human capital and setting the scene for women's participation in the labor market.

The most important challenge in the way of the demographic window is unemployment and lack of sufficient investment for the youth. Under circumstances when a significant proportion of the labor force cannot find a job, the potential dividend of a population can easily turn into a “demographic burden”.

Demographic window is a golden opportunity for development. Of course, it does not work automatically; benefiting from this demographic gift requires an appropriate social, economic, institutional and political environment.

3. ANALYSIS OF YOUTH SITUATION IN IRAN

In this section socio-demographic, health and economic status of youth is briefly reviewed.

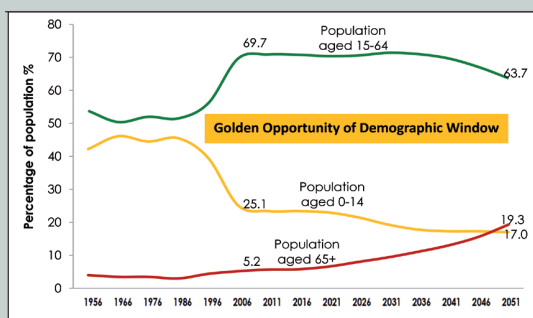
3-1. Demographic and Health Status of

Youth

In demographic terms, youth is a period of great significance compared with other periods of life cycle. Thus young period is referred to as “a dense period of demographic events” (Rindfuss, 1991). This means that most-demographic events and behaviors take place in the young ages. During these years, most changes and transitions of life such as graduation, entering the labor market, transition to adulthood, marriage and family formation, parental experiences, divorce, high-risk behaviors, migration, etc... take place.

The results of this study show that people's interest in migration varies in different life cycles. Most migrations and population mobility happen among youth (15-29). In the past two decades, the share of youth in migration flows has stood at 46-50%. Analysis of reasons for youth migration indicates that employment opportunities plays a significant share. Moreover, acquiring human capital or higher education are also important reasons for migration. A great number of Iranians who have emigrated abroad, are young university gradu-

Figure 2. Phases of Demographic Window in I.R. Iran



Source: Sadeghi, 2012.

ates. Although there are no precise statistics available on brain drain, emigration has today turned into a predictable behavior among many of the young elites.

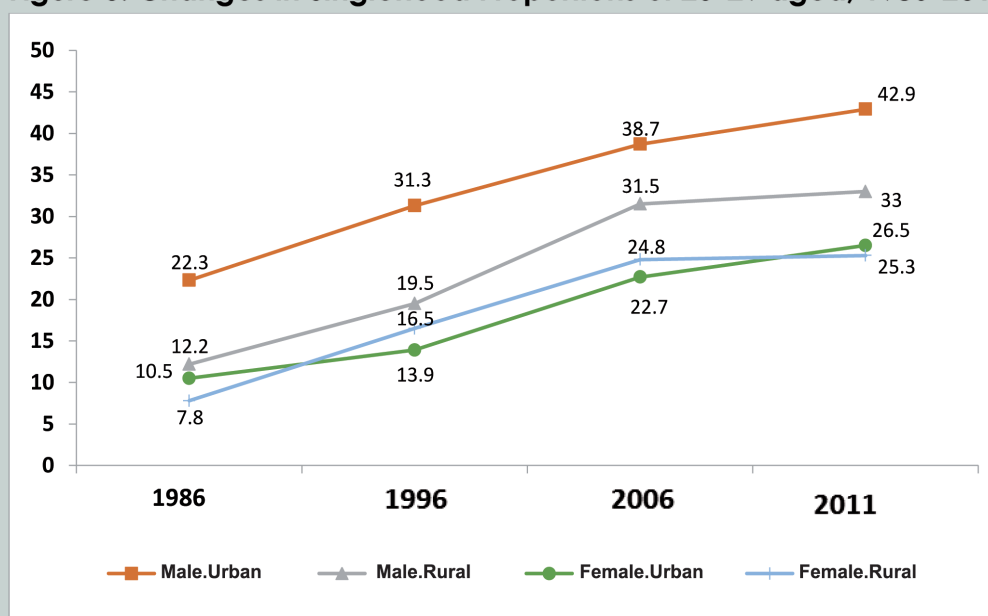
With regard to marriage, in the past three decades the country has experienced a rise in the number of unmarried youth. From 1986 to 2011, singlehood ratio increased among

Youth is referred to as "a dense period of demographic events". (Rindfuss, 1991)
This means that most population events and behaviors take place in the young ages 15-30.

adult men (25-29 aged) was identified in Ilam province (57%) and the lowest was in South Khorasan (22.4%). For women, the highest singlehood rate was in Ilam (39.5%) and the lowest in Yazd (15%).

Three factors affecting the increased rate of singlehood namely: availability (the possibility of having access to a suitable spouse given the sex ratio balance in marriage ages and criteria for choosing a spouse), feasibility (possibility of marriage in view of social and economic conditions) and desirability (the value of marriage given the social norms and individual motives).

Figure 3. Changes in Singlehood Proportions of 25-29 aged, 1986-2011



Source: Calculated based on the 1986-2011 censuses

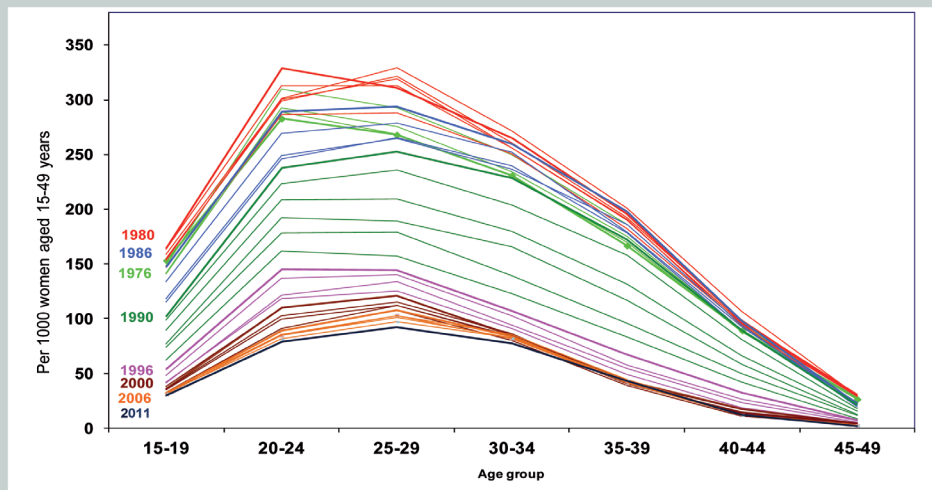
young men from 60% to 70% and among women from 36% to 48%.

Despite this rise in singlehood in the past 5 years (2006-2011), the rate of singlehood especially among women aged 15-24 has slightly dropped. Still, the growing trend of singlehood among women and men (25-29) is observed. In the past three decades, the percentage of unmarried women and men aged 25-29 has increased dramatically (Figure 3). The singlehood for women in the age group of 25-29 has risen to 26.2% down from 9.4% and for men it has increased from 8.5% to 40.5% over three decades. In other words, the rate of singlehood among women in this age group has tripled; for men it has more than doubled. In 2011 the highest rate of singlehood for young

The increase in the rate of divorce in recent years has turned into a social problem. In 2011, for every 100 marriages, 16.3 divorces were recorded. The highest percentage of divorce was among youth. Two fifths of divorce cases (42%) occurred in men and three fifths of divorces (60%) for women aged 15 to 29. Moreover, about 15% of divorces happen in the first year of marriage, 13% in the second year, 10% in the third year, 8% in the fourth year and 7% in the fifth year. Thus, more than half of divorce cases are in the first five years of marriage and mostly in young age. The study of the age structure of the divorced population in recent censuses showed that about one fourth of them are young people. The study of the childbearing behavior of

youth and its comparison with other groups reveals that youth has a significant share of the total fertility rate. The fertility rate in the age groups of 20-24 and 25-29 has always been higher than other age groups. Between 1981 and 1985, the total reproductive rate was about 7 children and the rate of youth fertility was about 4 children. Currently the total fertility rate is 1.8 and the share of youth is just slightly more than one child (Figure 4). Moreover studies show that today most young women have only two children or less.

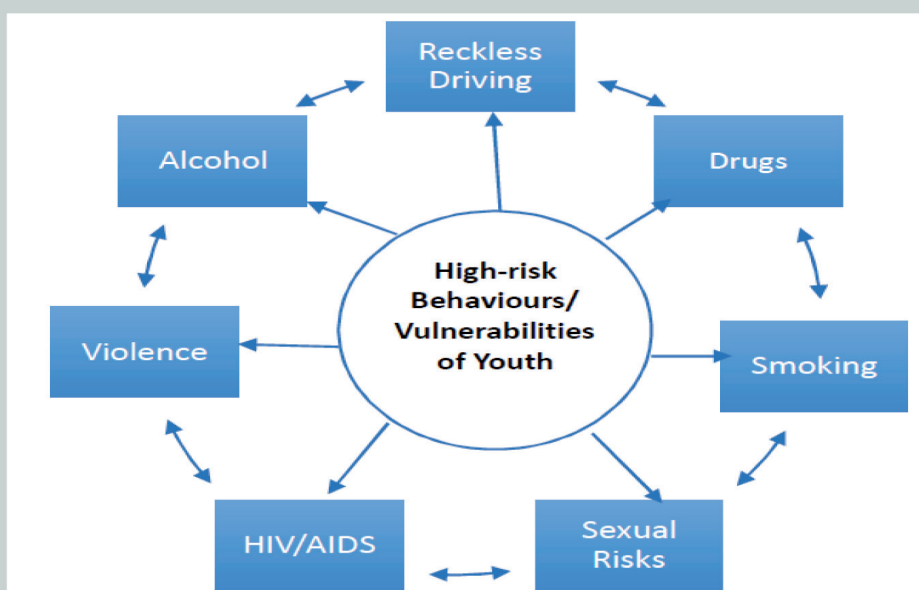
Figure 4. Age-Specific Fertility Rates in Iran, 1976-2011



Source: Abbasi-Shavazi, et al, 2009

Based on the results of the study, the youth period is a time of risk taking, emergence and disappearance of risk factors and high-risk behaviors. Evidence indicates health problems and high-risk behaviors are on the rise among the youth. Four common high-risk behaviors of Iranian youth include drug consumption (cigarette, alcohol, and illicit drugs), unsafe sexual contacts, HIV/AIDS and traffic accidents (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Aspects of High-Risk Behaviour/Vulnerabilities of Youth



In view of the rise in marriage age and the increase in the number of young single people as well as the concentration of reproduction in youth, health programs should pay special attention to reproduction health services for young people. However, in order to increase fertility rate, access to family planning services has been restricted in recent years. With this regards, results of this assessment reveal that in the absence of family planning services, unwanted pregnancies and abortion will become widespread and lead to irreparable consequences for women's health.

In addition, in Iran the mortality rate among young men (15-29) is higher than expected rate due to accidents. Mortality rate as a result of unintentional events (accidents) and intentional events (suicide...) is also higher among the youth compared to other age groups.

3-2. THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE YOUTH

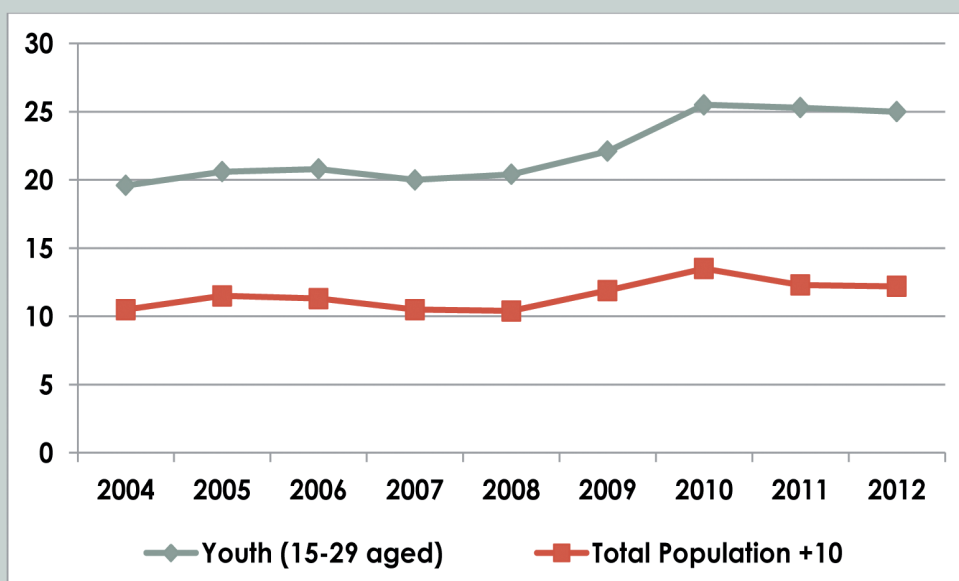
Since 2005 the demographic window phase has started with the youth bulge and a large group of young people entering the labor market. This phase is referred to as the golden opportunity of development in Iran. As mentioned above, the most important obstacle in the way is unemployment and lack of employ-

ment opportunities for the youth. Presently youth unemployment is a major challenge in Iran. About 70% of the unemployed are young. Also, the rate of youth unemployment has hit about 25%. Increase unemployment and long periods of joblessness have put youth at the risk of poverty and social problems more than ever.

In 2011, the youth's economic participation for men stood at 60.6% and for women 13.1%. Thus the young men's economic participation is about five times that of women's. Compared to other age groups, the rate of employment among youth is lower and they have a higher unemployment rate. The unemployment rate among youth aged 15-29 in 2011 stood at 25.3% (Figure 6). The rate of youth unemployment in urban areas is 27% and in rural areas 18%. For young men the unemployment rate is 22.1% and for young women 40.6%.

There is a significant difference between youth unemployment rates across provinces. The unemployment rate among young men has exceeded 30% in 8 provinces. For instance, this figure has reached 38% in the provinces of Khuzestan and Sistan-Balouchestan. The figure is close to 35% in Ilam, Kohkilouyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Lorestan and Kermanshah.

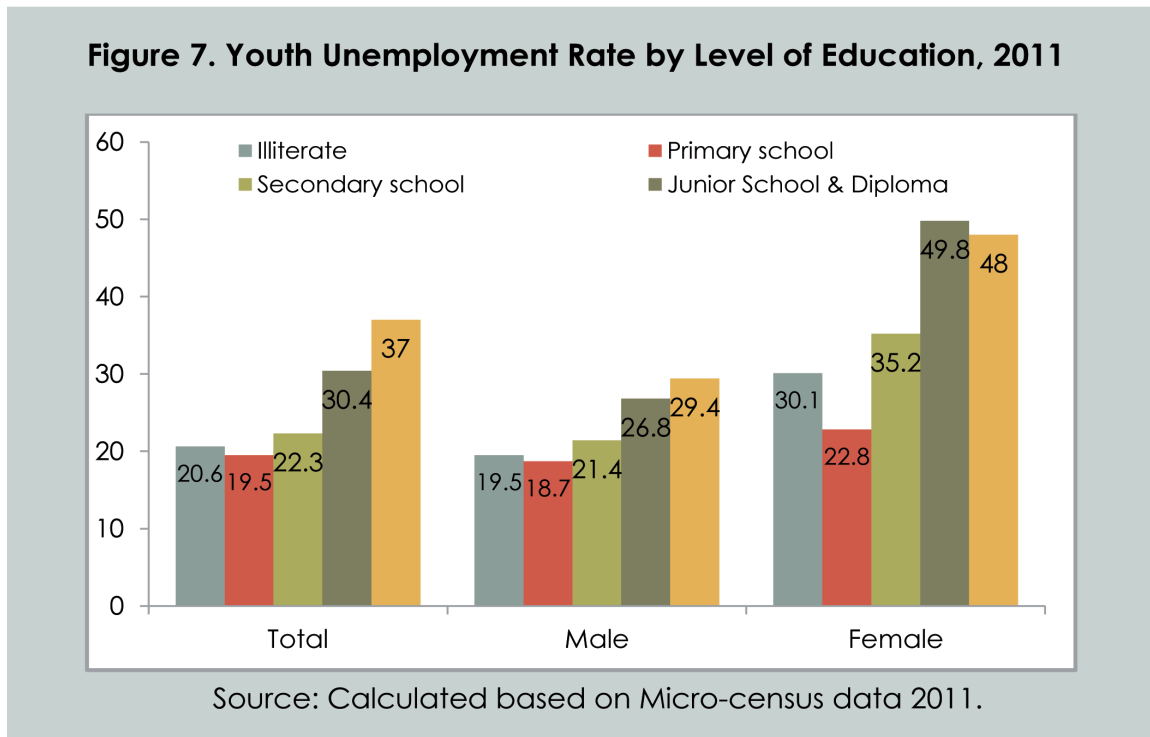
Figure 6. Comparison of Youth Unemployment and Total Unemployment Rates, 2004-2012



Source: Calculated based on Labour Force Survey and the 2011 Census

The rate of unemployment among young women is above 50% in the provinces on Kohkil-ouyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Ilam, Lorestan and Khuzestan and Kermanshah it is as high as 60%.

The highest unemployment rate is among youth with higher education. The unemployment rate for young men and women with higher education stands at 29% and 48% respectively (Figure



7). The change in age structure, youth bulge and increase in the population of university graduates have led to demands on the side of the youth to enter the labor market. The unemployment of university graduates imposes costs and problems on the society and families.

Therefore, more effective government interventions are required when it comes to policy formulation and employment plans. In this midst, creating income-generation opportunities is a necessity since youth is not only bringing about innovations, but is also the driver of 'economic development'. Lack of a proper planning to make effective use of this potential would lead to an irreparable loss for the country's economy.

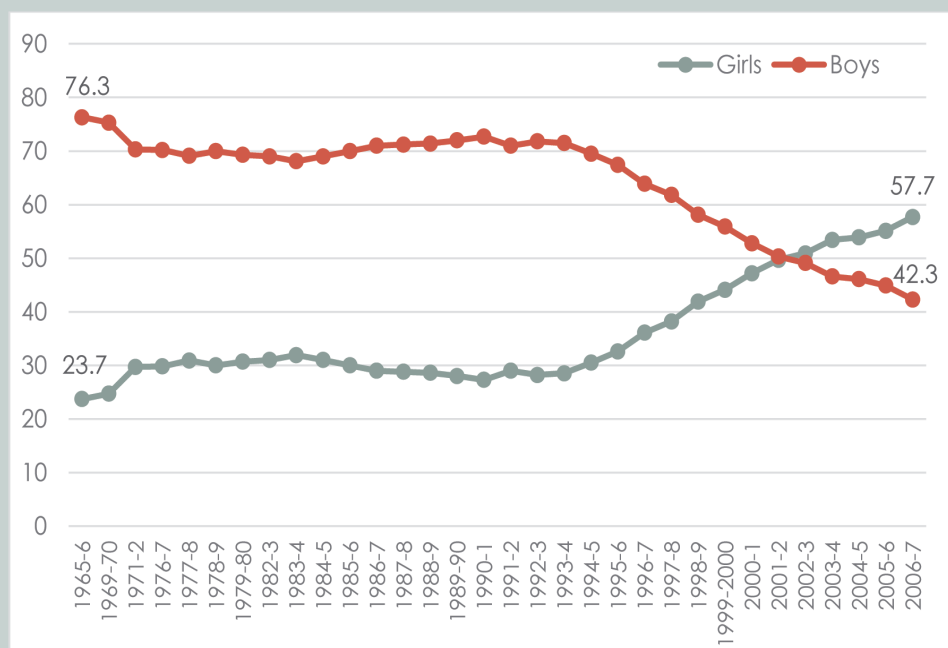
3-3. SOCIO-CULTURAL STATUS OF YOUTH

In recent decades, the social and cultural status of youth has dramatically changed. Increase in literacy and education rates, change in the leisure patterns, increased availability of the Internet and changes in the value systems

are some of these shifts.

Between 1976 and 2011, the literacy rate among young men increased from 28% to 96% and among young women from 10% to 97%. Youth is better educated compared to the population as a whole; in 2011, 28% of young women and 24% of young men had university education. In the past two decades, the number of university students has increased significantly by 13 times; that is from 340,000 students in 1991 to 4.4 million students in 2011. The sex ratio of university students has changed in recent years in favor of females (Figure 8).

The analysis of human capital among youth aged 15-29 (in terms of allocated time to acquire knowledge, skills and other abilities) using Time Use data in 2009, showed a very low rate of such activities among them. More than half of the youth (52.6%) in this study allocated no time during the day to activities concerning human capital. Girls were more active in acquiring human capital compared to boys.

Figure 8. Proportion of Girls and Boys Studying at Higher Education, 1965-2006

Source: Based on Khosro-Khavar & Qanei Nejad, 2010.

The study of the leisure time pattern of youth (15-29) in urban areas reveals that youth spends most of their time on individual roles. Housekeeping roles, professional, social and parental roles comes next.

Among activities related to individual roles, educational activities (formal or informal), watching TV, individual worship and personal care are more common.

Social roles are given just a little time and unlike other roles are less affected by the qualities of the young population. Thus any planning for increased social participation of the youth should be directed at paving the way for the participation of every young person. Designing voluntary activities in educational, cultural and social areas and encouraging young people to participate can contribute to the blooming of their talents and gaining the required life experiences.

The study of the leisure time patterns of the Iranian youth is showing the important and symbolic role of leisure time in their social life and its significant association with the different aspects of social inequality in the society (Sadeghi et al., 2010).

The study of Internet use showed that most Internet users in Iran are young.

In recent years, the rate of Internet use has

risen in Iran. In 1997, 10% of the youth; in 2002, 19% and in 2011, 29% used the Internet. In some provinces such as Tehran, Semnan and Isfahan, Internet usage among youth is more than 40%.

Thus, youth are more exposed to movements and processes of change and are more prepared to accept new norms, values and attitudes different from the previous generations.

4. POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

The study of the present policies and programs for youth in different domains shows that despite some advancement, there are a number of flaws. In particular, many national plans have remained mere "written papers" over the past two decades and have never been implemented. A review of the policies and programs for the youth allows the following points to be highlighted:

- One of the challenges official institutions face when it comes to planning, policymaking and implementation of relevant programmes for youth is that the status of such youth policies and plans is not well defined in the system of policy making and planning in the country. Funding allocation to such policies is also un-

clear, and there is no specific monitoring and evaluation plan and official enforcement for implementation.

- Attitude towards youth and youth affairs has changed in different eras, and whenever different administrations have come to power. For this reason, part of the adopted policies of one administration is ignored and not implemented in the proceeding one. Thus, there needs to be a non-political and independent institution responsible for continued planning, policymaking and implementation of youth related programmes.

- The prevailing attitude in youth policies and programs has been culture-based in most eras. This is while today most youth issues are of an economic nature. Therefore adopting an economic approach in the area of youth along with other approaches is needed more than ever and in particular, interventions are essential to reduce unemployment rate.

- The increase in youth's marriage age in recent decades shows that the programmes and policies concerning youth marriage such as the law on marriage facilitation and the law on organizing youth marriage have not been implemented effectively. Hence these laws need to be revisited to find out the cause of their failure. The question that must be dealt with is whether prior to the adoption of such policies, there was adequate assessment of their feasibility, or whether they were ratified merely due to policymakers' idealism?

Dominate approach in planning and youth policy in most era have been culture oriented. While the main issue of youth is economic one.

- To better understand the youth issues and to properly implement related policies, the youth themselves should be involved in the development of policies and laws. In other words, to better understand the problems of the youth, young people need to have a more active participation in the development of plans.

- Besides policy restrictions and comprehensive national plan, there are evident shortcomings in conducting national surveys and studies on youth explaining their values and expectations. Therefore, conducting a national survey on values and attitudes of youth is

a necessity. Databanks, surveys and complementary studies including longitudinal studies on youth can provide policymakers with proper evidence and improve their understanding of youth issues.

- There is no well-developed plan on the agenda of relevant organizations to review and/or revise the laws regarding the issue of unemployment, which can be considered the most important current challenge of the Iranian youth especially the university graduates.

- There is no youth-specific program available on youth health neither in laws, nor in policies and current plans. Young people are exposed to different health risk factors. But there is no clear program to reduce harms of such risks.

- Finally, training programs on family life skills, occupational skills and healthy lifestyle for youth are limited and insufficient.

5.CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Among different phases of age transitions, youth is of greater significance not only in demographic terms but also in terms of economic, social and political aspects and this leads to different opportunities and conditions. Therefore by studying the age structure transition we will be able to identify the current and future opportunities and challenges of a population.

Youth unemployment issues has to be taken seriously. Therefore, independent programs and policies has to be planned and implemented to tackle this issue.

The findings of this article show that demographic opportunities and challenges are mostly linked to proper management and policy formulation in the area of youth issues. If the new trends of age structure which is youth bulge and demographic window are to be managed properly and adequate policies are adopted, the way can be paved for benefiting from this golden opportunity and the various aspects of development can be addressed. On the contrary, with lack of proper management, not only will this opportunity be lost, but also the other side of the coin- that comprising of threats and challenges- is brought to the surface.

The present and future challenges of Iran's population are greatly dependent on how the golden era of youth and the demographic window is used. Turning this opportunity into a socio-economic opportunity requires youth empowerment in line with economic development, expansion of employment opportunities, adequate investment, improved quality of human capital and paving the way for the participation of young men and women in the labor market. Thus, the government's policies and programs for youth play a major role in the management and engineering of the demographic window phase.

Demographic opportunities and challenges are mostly linked to proper management and policy formulation in the area of youth issues. If the new trend of age structure which is youth bulge and demographic window, are to be managed properly, and adequate policies are adopted, the way can be paved for benefiting from this golden opportunity and the various aspects of development can be addressed. On the contrary, with lack of proper management, not only will this opportunity be lost, but also the other side of the coin -that which comprises threats and challenges- is brought to the surface.

Presently, the country's managers and policymakers are mostly focused on population ageing. Lack of attention to youth issues leads to the loss of opportunities hidden in this golden phase. Investment in and policymaking for youth employment as well as benefiting from the demographic window phase can lead to healthy, active and successful ageing. In the absence of such detailed planning, not only will the golden opportunity of youth bulge be wasted, but it will also lead to threats and challenges, resulting in the potential demographic dividend easily turning into a "demographic burden".

Therefore, young age is a time of opportunity as well as risk. Youth bulge is a two-sided sword; one side is opportunity and the other one, risk. In fact, while the youth bulge can be a golden opportunity for the country's development and growth it can be also the origin of many economic, political and social challenges. This paradoxical situation shows the necessity of a scientific-based and comprehensive understanding of all of the various aspects of young people's lives as well as proper

planning and policymaking for them. On this basis, the article's policy recommendations are presented below:

5-1 DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH PLAN FOR YOUTH

Research in the area of youth shows that despite all the various studies, most were conducted on an ad hoc basis, and with no comprehensive study being conducted.

Moreover there is a gap between policymaking entities and research centers. Many research studies do not address the main needs of policymaking centers. And finally, the recent transitions of Iran's youth population and its economic and social implications have not been studied adequately. On this basis, a detailed scientific and holistic understanding of social and economic aspects of the lives of young people is essential both academically and in terms of practical policy formulation (Abbasi Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2012).

Databanks, surveys and complementary studies including longitudinal surveys on youth values and attitudes, their needs and capacities can provide policymakers with a proper understanding of youth affairs. For this reason, the necessity of developing a comprehensive research plan on the characteristics, opportunities, capacities, needs, problems and expectations of young people as a basis of policymaking and planning is needed more than ever before.

The strategic objectives of the youth policy plan should aim to fulfill the needs of young people such as continued education, marriage, housing, health, employment and occupational opportunities.

5-2 DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR YOUTH

Investments in Infrastructure in the areas of health, education and particularly youth employment can help the country lay the foundations of a strong and sustainable economy. Empowerment of the youth and increase in their capacities during their active economic life can lead to better outcomes. On the contrary, unemployed youth with an unhealthy lifestyle can bring about various negative consequences.

Along the same line, developing a comprehensive policy document for youth and its successful implementation is an inevitable necessity in view of the country's population. In addition to being comprehensive, this document should be practical and easy to implement. The strategic objectives of the document should be directed at fulfilling the needs of young people such as continued education, marriage, housing, health, employment and occupational opportunities. The active, employed and reproductive young population can be a driving force for rising production and generating capital in the country. A healthy and agile population contributes to improving social, political and economic participation. and provides further socio-economic security as well as social welfare. More importantly youth participation in planning, implementation and evaluation of development plans that directly affect their future lives is necessary and can lead the country towards sustainable development. By not responding to the development needs of the youth, not only will this potential capital be wasted, but it will also lead to serious socio-economic implications.

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Policy Implications of Population Ageing in Iran

Majid Koosheshi*

Executive Summary

Increase in the number of the elderly people in Iran during the last two decades is rooted in the increase of life expectancy or decrease in mortality rates, and above all in the high rate of fertility in the years before 1950s. Therefore, the rapid decrease in fertility rates in Iran during 1986-2001 (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2009) would have no effect on the increase and growth of population of the elderly, at least not before 2050s. The result of all the projections - including the four UN scenarios in the 2012 version- indicate that regardless of the decrease or increase in fertility rates, the population aged 60 years old and over in Iran will probably be close to 30 million in 2050. Still, the decrease in fertility in Iran will be the cause of population imbalance in the various age groups of youth, middle age, and old age in future, and will therefore increase the old-age dependency ratio. The most important policy challenge of such dynamics will lie in issues related to retirement system (Defined Benefit-Pay As You Go), and the increase of social burden of ageing.

Decrease in sex ratio among the aged population based on Censuses 1996-2011 indicates the feminization of aging in future decades. The occurrence of massive migration waves of the young population to cities along with the decline in rural fertility rates makes of the ageing phenomenon rural. Furthermore, the ratio of the elderly who live alone is increasing and is higher among the elderly women. The economic participation and employment of male elderly, particularly in rural areas, is still high, and indicates their need to remain economically active. In all of these characteristics gender differentials are profoundly unequal and appear to be a social challenge for the current

elderly population. Considering the strong relation between the quality of life and the level of education of the elderly, it must be noted that the lower levels of literacy among the present generations of the elderly versus the higher levels of education and literacy among future elderly generations call for distinction between these generations with regard to welfare programming and planning in the future. Chronic and non-communicable diseases play a significant role in the physical health issues of the elderly; nevertheless, mental and social health as other aspects, constitute a significant part of these issues. The prevalence of disabilities due to chronic diseases and socio-mental disorders among the elderly, has made a group of them susceptible and vulnerable, and calls for long term health care programs. Regarding the kinship support, the elderly rely heavily on their children. Regardless of causes of mortality, elderly women remain unmarried more than elderly men, thus depending more on their children, while over 90% of the elderly men are not unmarried, and enjoy assistance from their wives and children. Accordingly, the role of wives and children for men, and the role of children for women, both unmarried and married, is a determinant factor in providing all kinds of supports, particularly health care supports. A host of policy options for providing long term health care can be devised in the form of home care services on society and nursing homes- to offer the required services according to the needs of the elderly.

* Assistant Professor of Demography, University of Tehran. kooshesh@ut.ac.ir

Introduction

Regardless of any attitude and analysis towards population changes of the country, the elderly¹ deserve equal, if not greater, attention than the young population in the formulation of social policies, when they constitute one of the most important sub-populations. Meanwhile, the increasing number of the elderly population in the world doubles the significance of this issue. Over 800 million of the almost 7 billion population of the world in the year 2012 were in their sixties or older. This is equivalent to more than 11% of the total population. The latest population projections indicate that with a growth rate of around 3% from 2011 to 2026, and over 2% from 2026 to 2051, the number of the elderly population will reach to almost 2 billion. Up to 2026, this rate will be about three times greater than the total population growth rate, and even more than three times greater from 2026 through 2051. If the UN medium variant scenario of fertility rate is verified, then almost 21% of the population out of the 9.5 billion will be in their sixties or older. In 2011, about one third of the population aged 60 years old lived in developed countries, and two third lived in less developed countries. This is while with the significant changes taking place between 2011 through 2026 in the population composition of the world, this ratio will fall to one-fifth for developed countries, and increase to four-fifth in less developed countries².

Iran has an exclusive status in the world with regard to the process of growing elderly population. While, compared to the three previous decades, the total population growth of the country has changed with somewhat slower rates during the two decades of 1990s to 2000s; the growth rate in the population of persons aged 60 years old and over has increased rapidly and reached three times the total population growth rate. Also, according to the latest version of the UN population projection, while it is estimated that the total population growth rate of the country during 2010 to 2025 will stand around 1.1%, and around

0.5% during 2025 to 2050; however, the annual growth rate of the population 60-year-olds and over, will be about 4.6%, and 4.1% during the first and second periods respectively. In other words, the annual growth rate of the elderly population of the country will be four times the total population growth of the country from 2010 through 2025, and eight times that figure from 2025 through 2050³.

Along with population changes and characteristics, including decrease in mortality, higher fertility rates in the past and its reduction during the past three decades, the social changes during the last half a century have had and will continue to have a broad impact on the life of old people. Increase in longevity as well as changes in life style and a greater share of chronic diseases, especially in those parts of the world incapable of promoting welfare and quality of life of the elderly; bring about their own challenges as well. Such challenges will be far greater, at least in less developed countries who by 2050 would be hosting about 80% of the 2 billion persons aged 60 years old and above.

Considering the population dynamics in Iran, this paper intends to briefly address the most significant issues related to the current and future elderly population of the country, and to suggest policies and solutions to national and international organizations as to how they can address such issues. The main body of the paper is composed of three parts. In part one, the issue of population ageing, issues related to old people, and the resulting implications to include such issues in policy making, will be discussed. In part two, some policy alternatives related to the aged population will be reviewed taking into account the existing plans and performance of relevant institutions for the elderly. Finally in part three will present, practical recommendations obtained from the study of population ageing in Iran.

1- In scientific studies of population ageing, "old age" is usually defined as 65 and more. When the share of the persons aged 65 and over reaches 7% of the total population, it is said that the population has entered the ageing phase. When this rate reaches 15% or higher a population is referred of 60 years old to as "aged". Given the differences between countries in terms of life expectancy and social programmes for providing services to the elderly population, the age of 60 years old is considered. The theoretical assumption of this definition change in physical condition which usually begin at the age of 60 (Strop, 2000, p. 128). In fact, the age of 65 is used to define the population ageing, and the age 60 individual ageing and ageing study.

2- World Population Prospect 2012.

3- UN medium variant scenario, population projection 2012.

Analysis of Socio-Demographic Status and Health Trends of the Iranian Elderly Population

The Increasing Number of Ageing Population

The population of the Iranian elderly can be precisely calculated based on the past six censuses of the country. In order to compare these figures, two periods, from 1966 to 1986, and from 1986 to 2011, were selected based on them being a turning point in population changes. In 1966, the number of persons aged 60 and older in the country was 1.6 million; this number was increased to 6.1 million in 2011 (i.e. four times more). The important point in this regard is that in 1966-1986, when the total population growth rate was 3.5%, the growth rate of the aged population stood at

country is at the onset of population ageing⁵. In other words, when life expectancy increases if those born in high fertility period could reach adulthood and ultimately old age a decrease in fertility implies moving towards ageing.

Population projections show that with lower fertility (i.e. decrease in the proportion of children and adolescents compare to total population), the share of children (less than 15) will drop, and the share of the elderly population (65 or more than 60) will increase both at a faster rate. One must not forget however that this same decrease in fertility could also engender a decrease in the growth rate of elderly population in future. This is because the future elderly is the same child born in low fertility conditions. This can be observed in Figure 1 where the lowest fertility rate causes a

Table 1: The population of 60 year olds and older in rural and urban regions, Iran, 1966-2011

Population of 60 year olds and older				Annual growth rate (percent)		
Year	Total	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Time Period	Total Population	60 and older
1966	1,638,042	36.5	63.5	1966-1986	3.5	2.2
1976	1,771,614	44.6	55.4			
1986	2,686,350	51.8	48.2			
1996	3,978,127	56.6	43.4	1986-2011	1.7	3.4
2006	5,114,110	64.1	35.9			
2011	6,159,676	68.7	31.3			

Source: Population and Housing Censuses, 1966-2011, Statistical Center of Iran

2.2%, while the period 1986-2011 witnessed a reverse trend, the growth rate of aged persons reached 3.4% per year for a 1.7% growth in the total population. (Table 1)

The high growth rate among people aged 60 and older (Table 1) indicates that the initial phase of population ageing (individual ageing⁴) has already started in Iran. So far the number of aged persons has reached well over 6 million. Considering the 5% ratio of population aged 65 and above in 2011, the

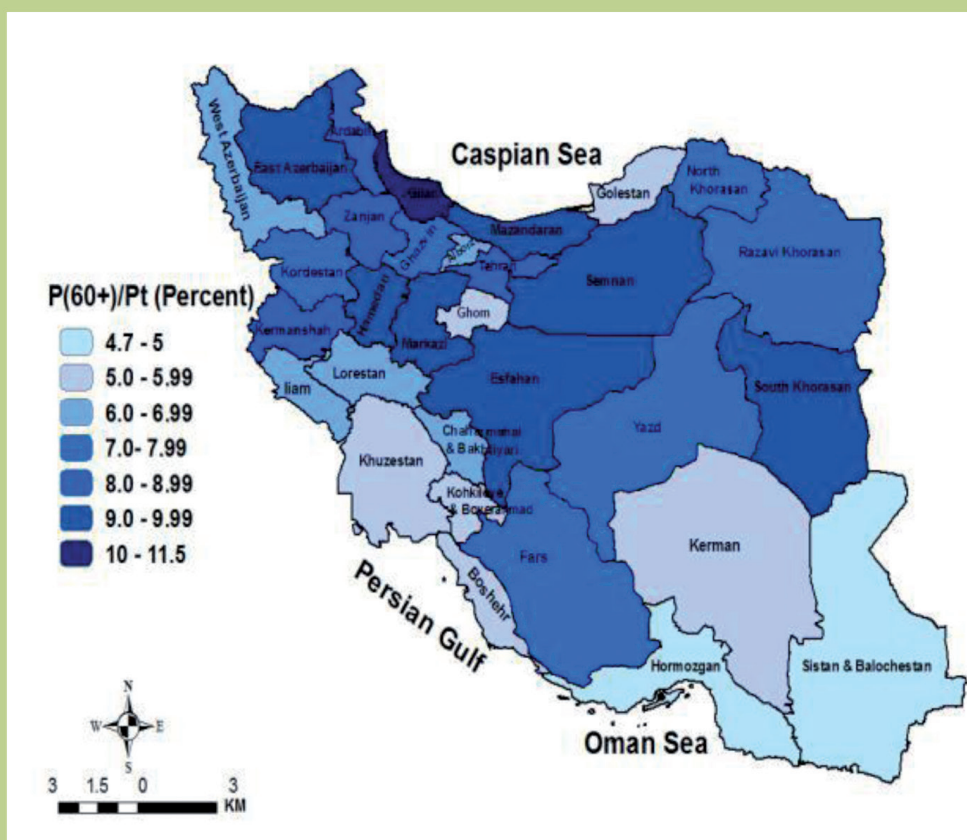
faster decrease in old-age dependency ratio⁶. Although migration has marginal impact on population ageing in general, its role however cannot be neglected in the ageing analysis of the population and in the number and growth rate of the elderly particularly in provinces. Map 1 shows regional and provincial variations in the population aged 60 and over in the country. The percentage of aged population in provinces that have higher fertility rates -and as such have a higher share of children than

4-Individual ageing is independent of fertility ratio and is used to refer to a group of people who are entering the old age, the number of which will increase with higher chances of survival.

5-Population ageing refers to the disruption of population ratio among different age groups. A change which begins with the decline of fertility rates and with the transition of the ratio of the population of persons aged 65 and older to higher than 7%

6-The old age dependency ratio is derived from the ration of the number of 65 plus population to the number of 15-64 years old population.

Map 1: Percentage of population aged 60 and above by provinces, I.R. Iran, 2011



Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011, Statistical Center of Iran

other regions of the country- is higher; in fact, in the southern, south-east, and south-west provinces the ratio is less than 6 percent, and in northern and central provinces with lower fertility, such as Gilan and Mazandaran, Isfahan, and Tehran, and of course other provinces with high rate of out-migrants, such as Eastern Azerbaijan, Southern Khorasan, and Hamedan, this ratio is higher.

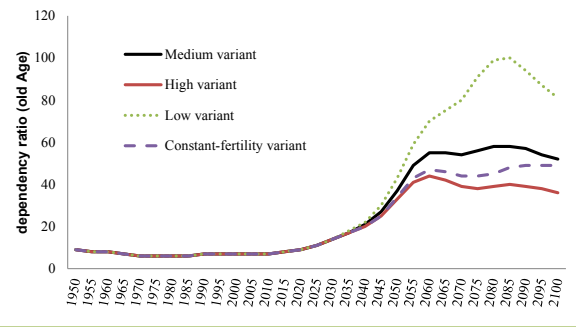
Figure 1 illustrates past trends and future projections for the old age dependency ratio, or the population of persons aged 65 and over to 100 persons aged 15-64. As illustrated in this Figure, the slight increase in the 65 plus population before 1986, and the considerable growth of the economically active population in 1986-1996 has maintained the old age dependency ratio at low levels, and at times has even caused a reduction. Subsequently, the increase in the elderly population and the a slow-down in the growth rates of economically-active population during 1996-2011 has led

to an increase in the old age dependency ratio in 2006, and its stability at that level in 2011. According to the United Nations population projections, in all of the four scenarios, the old dependency ratio will increase starting 2011. If the more realistic scenario takes place (i.e. the medium variant scenario), it is predicted that this ratio will increase to 55 elderly per 100 aged 15-64 in 2060s, and will remain so until 2080s, and then it will fall to 40 persons in the last decade of the 21st century. This indicator has considerable implications for the government's planning as well as planning for retirement/pension funds. For instance, the increase in this ratio indicates that the current system of retirement (defined benefit) will be gradually bankrupt in the years to come.

The Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Considering the crucial variations regarding demographic and socio-economic status of the elderly, gender composition of the aged population is of prime importance. In spite of

Figure 1: The no. of population aged 65 and above per 100 aged 15-64, Iran, 1951-2100



Source: World Population Prospects, Rev. 2012/The Four UN Scenarios Of Population Prospects

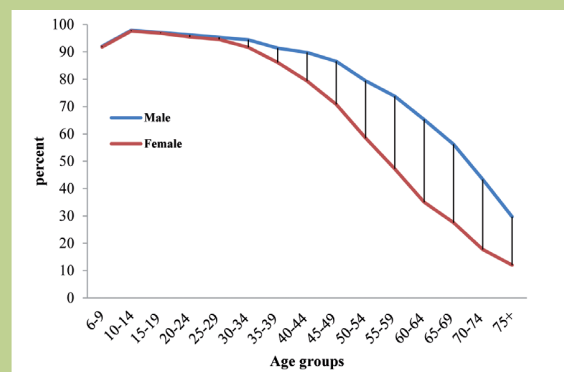
the high levels of life expectancy in the country, the share of aged women to the total ageing population is lower than the expected rates. During 1966 to 2007, excluding 1986, the sex ratio of the population aged 65 and over was about more than 110 men to 100 women. According to the 2011 census, the sex ratio of the elderly dropped so low as to indicate equal share of men and women. An analysis of the changes in the sex ratio of one age group to the next indicates that, the change in the sex ratio has not taken place overnight; rather it has decreased in each generation and in most cases gradually from one census to another. Therefore, during recent decades the sex ratio of the elderly population has changed, and it is predicted that it will switch into feminization of ageing just like other countries in the world.

Despite the relative improvement in literacy rate of 60 plus people in the country both in rural and urban areas from 1976 to 2011, still the three characteristics related to the literacy status of the aged population are of prime importance for the planning and policy making for the elderly. The first one is that literacy level among old people is lower than all other population groups in the country. The second one is the great gap between rural and urban areas in this regard. The third characteristic, still an existing issue, is the marked difference between male and female elderly. The literacy rate among the elderly men in the country in 2011 was about 48% versus 24% for that of women and in the aged population of both sexes in urban areas it was about 46% compared to only about 14% in rural areas.

As shown in Figure 2 the literacy level is highly dependent on age. In other words, literacy

level among the youth, who will constitute the future elderly, is high, and there is a negligible sex gap in this regard. To put it more clearly, in future, the aged population of the country will be comprised of people with higher levels of literacy and a less marked difference between the sexes in this regard. Such a remarkable change is one of the positive outcomes of development which pictures a promising future for the aged population of the country.

Figure 2: Literacy rate by Age Group and Sex, I. R. Iran, 2011



Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011, Statistical Center of Iran

As illustrated in Table 2, about 22% of the total population aged 60 and above have been economically active in one of the occupations listed in the 2011 Census. In the same year, economic participation rate of the elderly in urban areas, which includes mostly men, falls to lower than 16%, which is rather low in comparison to the same number for the rural areas with a participation of 37 percent. The important point is that during the socio-economic changes of the past 35 years, this participation rate has had a decreasing trend.

Living Arrangement and Social Support

Intergenerational and family relations of the elderly are generally influenced by the age of marriage, spread and prevalence of marriage, and the number of children (fertility rate). In traditional communities, women marry at earlier ages than men and hence a greater number of them have been married at least once before the age of 50. Nevertheless, considering the age difference of the husband and wife on one hand, and different life expectancy levels between the two sexes on the other, women always outnumber men in being without spouse in old age. This is not only because women lose their spouses, but it is due

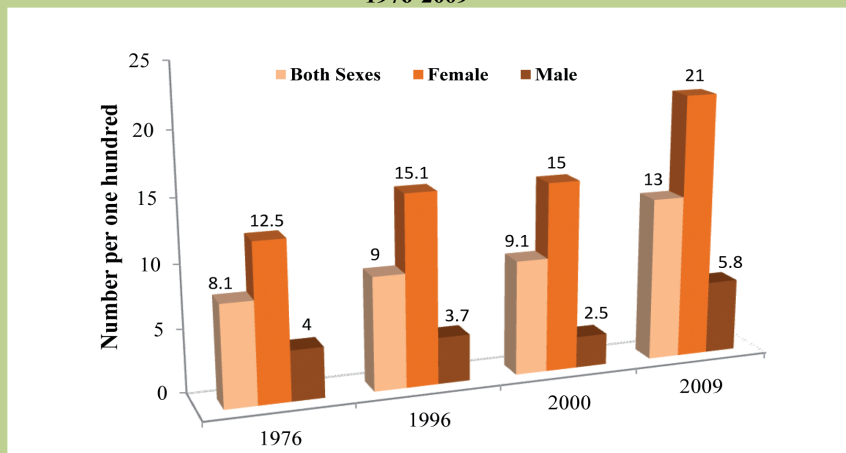
Table 2: Economic participation rate for 60+ elderly in urban and rural areas, I.R Iran, 1976-2011

	Area	Year				
		1976	1986	1996	2006	2011
Economic participation rate	Total	35.5	35.3	34.3	24.6	22.4
	Urban Areas	28.2	28.5	27.9	19.8	15.6
	Rural Areas	41.3	42.5	42.5	33.0	37.5

Source: Population and Housing Censuses, 1976-2011, Statistical Center of Iran

to the difference between men and women in re-marrying. Therefore, part of such variations – and at times, inequalities in the life of the aged people, particularly in communities where such variations and difference between old men and women is noticeable- is rooted in

living under the same conditions. Three points can be mentioned in this respect. The first point is that in all years, the ratio of women who live alone has always been higher than men. This difference is basically rooted in the differences of marital behaviour and the signif-

Figure 3: Elderly who live alone per one hundred elderly 60+ by sex, Iran, 1976-2009

Sources: 1976, 1996, UN 2005, 2002 Adapted from the Report on the Health Conditions of the Elderly in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2002; 2009 from the Data on Passing Time, Iran Census Bureau.

the differences of the conditions of marriage for old men versus women. For instance, in a society like Iran, where men are traditionally the main owners of property and wealth, having a spouse plays a crucial role in having access to resources, and thus better quality of life for aged women (Ghazi-Tabatabaei et al., 2008). In 2011, the proportion of aged women who were without a spouse was 49%, while for aged men the figure drops to below 9%. Needless to add that there is no significant difference between urban and rural areas in this respect (Koosheshi, 2009).

Figure No. 3 clearly indicates that the proportion of elderly who live alone has been increasing over time. Comparing the status of men and women in the country shows that the increase in the ratio of the elderly who live alone is mostly affected by the increase in women

living under the same conditions. Three points can be mentioned in this respect. The first point is that in all years, the ratio of women who live alone has always been higher than men. This difference is basically rooted in the differences of marital behaviour and the significant differences in the ratio of re-marriage after the death of the spouse, or divorce. The second point is that the ratio of women who live alone has increased much faster in the years 1976 through 2009. The third point, also closely related to the first two points is that, the gender differences of the elderly have increased from the perspective of their living arrangements. This gap has increased from 8% in 1976 to 15% in 2009. Therefore, an important phenomenon in the living arrangements of the Iranian elderly is the increase in the ratio of elderly living alone, and its transition towards a more female dominated proportion, which will make the condition worse for women in future, in case it continues. According to the country's socio-demographic changes ahead, we expect this phenomenon to become even

more prominent in the future.

Although there is a strong relationship between the fertility rate of the elderly and children availability for them, and also between children availability and their functional children, (Koosheshi, 2008), further comparison indicates not all the available children have functional support for the elderly. According to studies and available research, from an average 5.6 live born children to the elderly (sample from Tehran, who participated in the research in 2007), about an average of 4.7 children survived for each elderly person, 2.4 of whom were boys, and about 2.3 were girls. From the average number of children who survived for the elderly, almost 4 (3.9) children left the elderly's household, about half of whom are boys and the other half are girls. From among the average 3.9 children who are separated from the elderly household, the number of supportive children is about 2.5 children (including 1.2 sons and 1.4 daughters). Therefore, as also mentioned earlier; almost half of the average number of surviving children of the elderly are supportive children.

In that study, sources of informal social support in kin network include: spouse, children, daughter-in-law and son-in-law, brothers and sisters, and extended family members; and in the non-kinship social networks friends, neighbours, and co-workers and colleagues are included. Types of supports received from kin and non-kin networks include: emotional support, care giving support, transportation and financial support. The study clearly indicates that there is a strong association between instrumental supports such as financial support and the source of support.

Although the elderly enjoy greater resources for emotional support (namely, family and relatives, friends, neighbours, and co-workers), however, help for nursing and care taking, transportation, or financial support are mostly provided by kin networks, and in particular to children, or son-in-laws and daughters-in-law.

Research also shows that the spouse and children of the elderly play vital and determining roles for the aged men during nursing, and for the aged women in providing financial support and transportation. Considering

the fact that aged women generally lack sufficient financial resources, they are therefore not able to be a source of financial support for their husbands. Since a great share of elderly women are unmarried, therefore, children play an important role in providing all the needs of this group of the aged persons, (Koosheshi, 2008).

Health Status and Service Benefits

According to assessments of health conditions of the elderly in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and screening of the health status of the elderly residing in Tehran, the most prevalent ailments of the elderly are in order of importance: arthritis, visual disorders, hypertension, lumber disc, cardiovascular diseases, sleep disorders (insomnia), gastritis and ulcer, diabetes, and depression. The most significant difference between elderly men and women lies in one of their most prevalent health problems which is visual disorders for elderly men, and arthritis for elderly women. The daily activity indicator on the other hand shows that less than 10% of the aged need help to perform their daily chores (MOHME 2002 and 2012; Screening Health Status of the Elderly in Tehran 2007). The following three indicators measure the extent of using health services among the elderly: the waiting list for hospitalization, percentage of individuals in need of ambulatory health care services, and percentage of individuals requiring hospitalization. The average daily number of patients at various age groups waiting to be hospitalized in Iran during 2002, indicates that ages 50 to 65, and 65 and over, have the highest rate of waiting. This is while among the number of 65-plus individuals requiring hospitalization, and emergency care, except childhood, is higher at the -65 age group. The percentage of patients requiring ambulatory health care services, indicates that although this percentage is slightly higher in ages 1-4 than old ages, however, after the age of 15, this percentage escalades for older people, reaching its peak for ages 65 and older.

Policy Options

The available welfare and well being social policy options in Iran, regarding the elderly, can be explained based on a number of significant selective criteria, situation analysis, and popula-

tion trends. These criteria can be considered in instances such as planning and policy-making theories and approach, application domain, the vision of the program, social target groups, and levels of influence and interventions. In general, programs of welfare for the aged must be comprehensive, based on their broad participation, realistic, and flexible.

The programs must necessarily avoid interfering in population ageing debates, at least when the important issue is policy-making for the social welfare of the elderly. However, in the domain of social security, and regarding the significance of imbalances of major population sub-categories (under 15, 15-64, and 65 and older) in population ageing, the focus of all old-age programming must be directed towards adjustment and improvement of retirement and pension system. Since social planning and policy making for the elderly specifically targets the said population group, it is the number and growth rate of this population group that is of concern, not their share and proportion to the total population. However, if elderly planning enters into social policy areas such as retirement, one can talk about population ageing as change in the proportion of the elderly population and its relationship with adult and middle age population (i.e. 15-64 years old). According to the data collected regarding the situation of the elderly, the two national and regional options can be proposed to plan or to program for the social welfare of the Iranian elderly population. In the regional programming, it is deemed necessary to take into consideration the distinctions and special needs of each region as well as the available potentials to promote the social welfare of the elderly. Regarding the time scope, the approach based on solving the problems of the elderly in the medium-term plans, particularly the national socio-economic development plans, is a crucial policy option which can cover the shortcomings of the operational programs, and the population changes ahead, as well as the socio-economic characteristics of the elderly persons. The long-term projects on the other hand, must be formulated and planned according to the needs and characteristics of future generations of the elderly in the national and regional planning framework. Another important issue related to program-

ming and social policy-makings of the elderly is determining the target groups. The social welfare programs for the elderly must be goal-oriented, and move towards eliminating the socio-economic injustices. The priorities could be based on determining degrees of vulnerability of the elderly. Benchmark studies in the report on the "Population Ageing in Iran" (Population and Development Project, Tehran University, 2013), have classified these priorities in the following categories: elderly widows and those who live alone and are childless for any reason, particularly the poor elderly who live in the suburbs, and specially when the elderly is a woman. Finally, regarding levels of influence and interventions-due to legal gaps in providing the welfare and well-being of the elderly on the one hand and lack of enforcement of existing programs on the other-the comprehensive program for the elderly must have some bearings on both legislative and executive branches in accordance with the short and long-term circumstances and horizons and to cause significant changes in this process. A survey of the programs and approaches of the relevant organizations reveals that certain programs need to be re-reviewed while some of them have never been executed and remain unaccomplished. In the current elderly plans, the main burden of official protection systems rests upon governments. Only one NGO charity (Kahrizak) in the country is active in supporting the elderly, which of course has a number of branches in a few regions of the country. In fact, under the current circumstances, there is no plan for developing NGOs, including Para-governmental organizations, charities, and NGOs, and the available capacities are left unexploited.

Suggestions

Suggestions resulting from the trends and situation analyses mentioned earlier can be summarized in the following categories:

A) Planning and Policy Approaches

* Unmeasured and unprofessional emphasis on the relationship between fertility and population ageing, in the discussions about population policies of Iran in recent years has led to the misunderstanding that population ageing is a worrisome phenomenon, and that the

only remedy to avoid this reality is increasing fertility and natality. This misunderstanding in turn has led to the erroneous belief that the elderly are a group of disabled individuals and a burden on others. This is while the number of old persons who pass away without any serious disability, outnumbers those who die with a disability. Therefore, although ageing (both individual and population) is inevitable, disability is not. Such wrong approaches must be modified through scientific findings, prior to any planning for the elderly.

B) Covering the Elderly in Social Welfare and Development Plans

* Adopting a scientific approach in social policy-makings, comprehensive planning and integrated policies, effective inter-sectoral coordination especially in the fields of health and welfare as well as avoiding duplication work are among the prerequisites of a practical program for moving towards a healthy, and elderly-friendly society. In addition, along with the formulation of the national plan of ageing, inclusion of the social policies of ageing in socio-economic plans, such as the Sixth National Development Plan is deemed necessary.

* According to the latest census of Iran (2011), the population of the oldest old (ages 80 and over) has been more than 919,000 and projections indicate that the number will reach 5 million in 2050, regardless of changes in fertility rates. Since the population, societal and ailment, disabilities, and health issues for this class of elderly population is much higher than other groups, it is necessary to pay particular attention to them in any programming.

* Given provincial variations, it is necessary that the plans for the elderly be prepared taking into account the national dimensions as well as adopting a regional, decentralized approach. In all planning and policy-makings for the elderly, the crucial point is to look at the target groups independently from population indicators. The densely populated provinces host obviously the highest number of the elderly, however, details of the present study indicate that these provinces may not necessarily host higher number of vulnerable old persons.

* The sex ratio of the elderly has decreased in recent years, and will continue to decrease in

future as well, and the phenomenon of ageing will be feminized. Therefore, due to the significant impact the gender of the elderly makes in the quality of life and status of the Iranian elderly, it is necessary to formulate separate gender-specific programs. For instance, the financial capacities of elderly men and women in Iran vary widely, and unfortunately women usually face harder financial conditions after they lose their husbands. About 80% to 90% of elderly women have never been employed, thus they are not financially independent at older ages.

* Given the demonstrated relationship between literacy and education (or generally schooling) with the quality of life and welfare of the elderly, given the high proportion of illiterate women and the importance of the presence of the husband, the high ratio of unmarried women is a serious challenge both for present and for future. Any welfare plan and promotion of the quality of life of the elderly must take these two vulnerable groups into consideration.

* Unlike elderly women have no hope in finding a job in the stagnant job market, elderly men are still highly eager to have active participation in the job market. While this characteristic reflects on the need this population has to gain an income out of economic participation in this period of their lives, this also brings to light the deficiencies and low coverage of the retirement and formal support systems protecting the needy elderly. Since the coverage of retirement and pension funds depends heavily on contributions made in the course of employment of individuals, it is therefore almost impossible to develop a pension system for the present generations particularly for women. However, it is necessary to pay special attention to such subclasses of population in the formal protection systems. Special focus should be placed on programs that prevent the increase in the number of the elderly below the poverty-line.

* There have been profound changes in the living arrangements of the elderly in recent years. Given recent developments and future trends of the Iranian population, particularly fertility below replacement level and delayed marriages, the ratio of the elderly who live alone will most probably increase. The increase in the share of this latter elderly group

in all the countries of the world, is one of the serious challenges in social welfare and well-being planning, especially in communities where in most of the elderly rely heavily on the informal social supports and kin networks. Development of the private sector for providing long term care is necessary, at least for those elderly who are affluent enough to buy their services if needed, along with developing self-care programs. Especially because with growing older, the possibility of needing long term care, or solitary living also increases.

C)The Organizations Relevant to Planning and Implementing Social Policies of the Elderly

* Different types of support received by the elderly indicate that kin network plays a more outstanding role than the network of neighbours, friends and colleagues. Studies of the informal social networks and kin networks that support the elderly in Iran indicates that present generations of the elderly mostly benefit from the high capacity of informal social and kinship supports. This is while with the decline in the number of children, this capacity will be most probably limited for future generations further emphasizing on the fact that the government must attempt to compensate for this deficiency. Therefore, organizations and institutions responsible for social policy-makings regarding the elderly must simultaneously plan and execute a short and a long term program in this respect. Firstly, a program appropriate for the present generations which must stress on encouraging the supportive relatives of the elderly, and secondly, a long term program for a greater community of aged persons who – in comparison with the present generations- will have lesser chances of enjoying kin network support. Developing, promoting, organizing and monitoring the available NGOs is the best policy alternative in this regard.

* The increase in life expectancy and population ageing may increase the financial and economic load of the Defined Benefit-Pay As You Go (DB-PAYG) retirement and pension system, possibly introducing serious challenges for such funds, and pushing them to-

wards bankruptcy due to the increase in the number of years they have to pay retirement pension as well as their limited levels of financial resources. Changing pension systems from Defined Benefit-Pay As You Go (DB-PAYG) to Defined Contribution system is necessary but calls for ceaseless endeavours, and is definitely costly and time consuming. It is therefore suggested that during the transition of the retirement and pension system, other policy options such as Flexible Retirement⁷ be used as a short term solution.

* It is also necessary that the Welfare Organization presents and implements a specified practical program for standardization of services and health cares for the elderly. In addition, providing diverse services for the elderly according to the needs of the elderly in the country, and based on the international protocols is also required.

* Another challenge ahead in social policy-making is the lack of an infra-structure established to pay the expenses related to old age insurance (such as base, and complementary insurances), which has made it difficult to establish and expand various services and cares for the elderly, such as home care, home visit, day care centers, nursing homes, and sanatoria. This is of course an external activity which calls for the coordination of at least two institutions of Ministry of welfare and insurance organizations.

* Still another challenge -which is a huge obstacle for the establishment and expansion of old age care systems and services in the country- is the lack of a scientific and accurate understanding of the old age insurance payment systems, (both base and complementary insurances). In all other countries in the world nowadays, the costs of all types of services the elderly may need, such as care services, medicines, aid facilities, clinical and Para clinical tests, are calculated according to Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment protocol (CGA), and the countries are required to execute it after the retirement age of their citizens from the age of 65 and older. Not following this framework is the main problem in implementing the nursing programs for the elderly.

* The grave problem of not paying sufficient

7. Flexible retirement refers to a reduction in working hours or rank, which must be mutually agreed by the employer and the employee of 55 year old or older.

attention to establishing and following physical standards, places and locations, residences, and nursing centers for the elderly (Elderly-Friendly City), is another huge challenge in planning for the elderly.

* At present, researchers have access to the results obtained from the limited number of studies carried out as national representative sample, about the health issues of the elderly, though these are not timely data (such as the non-representative data of 2002). In order to collect data and make them available to researchers, the following suggestions are proposed:

A. The data must be available on time to academicians and researcher, regardless of the quality of the data, and comprehensive programs must be formulated for classifying them in a way to cover all aspects of the life of the elderly.

B. Data collections are sporadic and scattered. In most cases, researchers are unaware that there are data on various aspects of the life of the elderly. It is therefore plausible to classify the available data before the number of the research exceeds a manageable limit making it difficult to classify them. With an inter-institutional coordination, these studies can be made accessible to all researchers.

* A high percentage of illnesses and health problems of the elderly is related to chronic and non-contagious diseases. Such ailments require long term treatments and are very costly. Therefore, in order to reduce the side effects of such illnesses in the elderly community, providing care services must be a top priority.

* In order to promote elderly health, self-care trainings and programs must top the list of the priorities of health service systems at various health care networks (which have been spreading properly throughout the country). It is therefore necessary to employ the latest self-care methods in order to train the elderly and their family members.

* Regarding the fact that most of the health problems and ailments of old age begin long before one gets old, planning preventive measures as well as care methods must start in earlier years. Therefore, a healthy life style

including proper and correct nutrition (e.g. reducing sugar, oil, and salt consumption), sufficient work-outs and physical activities, quitting smoking, and improving personal hygiene must be given exclusive attention.

* Another type of old age issues are socio-psychological problems. Improving the social and psychological health conditions of the elderly is of prime importance and must be integrated in the health care plans. More specifically, the policies and social support plans needed for vulnerable groups such as women, villagers, and nomads, are among the top priorities for promoting the health status of these groups and in order to eliminate any injustices.

* Regarding the problems and shortcomings of the current situation of the programs for the elderly, it is necessary to perform the following pilot projects at national levels:

A. Reforming the infrastructure of the insurance systems for the elderly, such as cutting the costs of medicinal, treatment, and health care services, and improving the conditions of nursing homes.

B. Establishing a demographic data bank.

C. Constructing a sample elderly friendly town, a condominium for the retired elderly, establishing one or more health care centers for them in which various health services will be available, and at least one hospital, as well as a nursing centre according to international standards for the elderly with Dementia.

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Female-Headed Households in Iran: A Growing and Heterogeneous Group

Fatemeh Torabi*

Mahmoud Ghazi-Tabatabaei *

During the last five decades, the number and proportion of female-headed households has been on the rise: from 6.5 percent in 1966 to 12.1 in 2011. The undeniable distinction between female and male-headed households as well as the significant differences in terms of the social, demographic, and economic features reveals specific and diverse needs encountered by this latter group. Furthermore, the significant differences between female-headed households residing in urban and rural areas and in different provinces call for the need to adopt a regional approach to policymaking and to develop local plans for responding to the needs of these households and improving their living circumstances. To this end, it is imperative that comprehensive policies on female-headed households be adopted to provide harmonized terminologies and required services to respond to the diverse needs of this stratum. In addition, as there are currently various governmental and non-governmental institutions engaged in the provision of services to the increasing number of female-headed households around the country, the operation of these institutions under the auspices of one central entity is recommended in order to eliminate the existing executive impediments.

* Assistant Professor of Demography, University of Tehran. fatemeh_torabi@ut.ac.ir

* Professor of Demography, University of Tehran. smghazi@ut.ac.ir

Features of Female-Headed Households in Iran

The head of a household is a member of that household who is known as the head in that unit and is commonly responsible for covering all or the major share of the expenditure of the household or decision-making concerning the manner of spending the household revenues (SCI, 2014).

In Iran, the number and proportion of households being headed by women has been on the rise with major differences between provinces being recorded. The percentage of female-headed households grew from 6.5 percent of the total number of households in the country in 1966 (the equivalent of 329,062 households) to 12.1 in 2011 (the equivalent of 2,548,072 households). While there is no significant difference between the proportion of female-headed households in rural and urban areas (12.2 percent in urban areas and 11.8 percent in rural areas), this share has been fluctuating from 9.3 in the Province of Kohkilooyeh and Boyerahmad to 16.4 in the Province of Sistan and Baloochestan (Ghazi-Tabatabaei, and Torabi, 2013).

As explained further below, Iran's female-headed households are more disadvantaged than male-headed households in terms of the proportion of the head of households being elderly, being spouseless, or for what concerns their educational, economic and health status (Aliakbari-Saba & Chegini, 2013; Ghazi-Tabatabaei, Torabi, Mehrabi).

Age Structure:

The share of the elderly among female-headed households is over three times as much as that of male-headed ones. In 2011, 36.9 percent of female heads of households were aged 65 and above while only one-third of this figure (11.1 percent) applied to male heads. In addition, less than 10 percent of female heads were aged below 35 while over half of them were between 35 and 64.

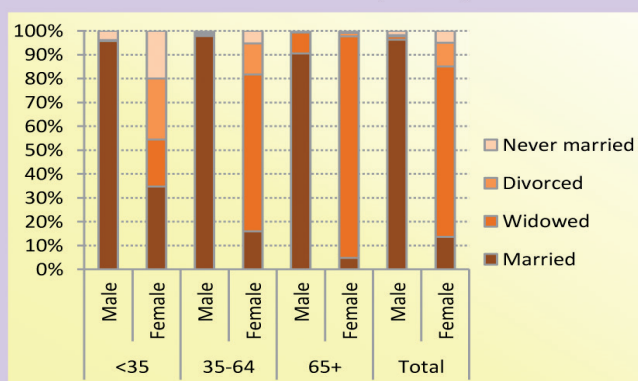
It is worth noting of course that there are considerable differences between provinces in this regard too. More specifically, the percentage of elderly female heads of households varies from 19.7 in the Province of Sistan and Baloochestan to 50.4 in the Province of Yazd. The former province also depicts a distinct pattern regarding young female heads of households in that women aged 35 and below comprise one-fifth of the overall number of such households while the same number is 10 percent or lower in most of Iran's provinces.

Marital Status:

The high number of spouseless female heads of households – particularly those widowed – is yet another feature of this population group. Figure 1 below illustrates that 81.3 percent of female heads of households are spouseless (71.4 percent due to the demise of the spouse and 9.9 percent due to divorce); 96.3 percent of male heads, on the other hand, have a spouse.

In addition, there are significant differences among young, middle-aged, and elderly fe-

Figure 1 – Heads of Households by Marital Status, Sex, and Age of the Household Head in Iran (2011)



Source: Ghazi -Tabatabaei and Torabi (2013, p. 29) excerpted from SCI (2011).

The significant diversity in the marital status of young female heads of households needs to be specifically addressed by policymakers.

male heads of households in terms of their marital status (Figure 1). While over 90 percent of female heads aged 65 and above are spouseless due to their spouse's demise, for female-headed households at the age of 35 and above, over one-third are married, one-fourth divorced, one-fifth widowed, and one-fifth never married. In other words, young female heads of households portray a considerable degree of diversity regarding their marital status with this trend necessitating specific policymaking and planning.

There are also noteworthy discrepancies of provincial distribution in the context of female heads of households' marital status. The Province of Sistan and Baloochestan accommodates the highest rate of married female heads (31.8 percent as opposed to only 7.7 percent in the Province of Kermanshah). The highest percentage of widowed female heads belongs to the Province of Ilam (84.4 percent while the figure is 54.1 percent in the Province of Sistan and Baloochestan). The Province of Alborz houses the largest number of divorced female heads (20.0 percent vis-à-vis only 2.2 percent in the Province of Ilam). Finally, the highest percentage of never married female heads resides in the Province of Tehran (8.6 percent as opposed to 1.6 percent in the Province of

North Khorassan).

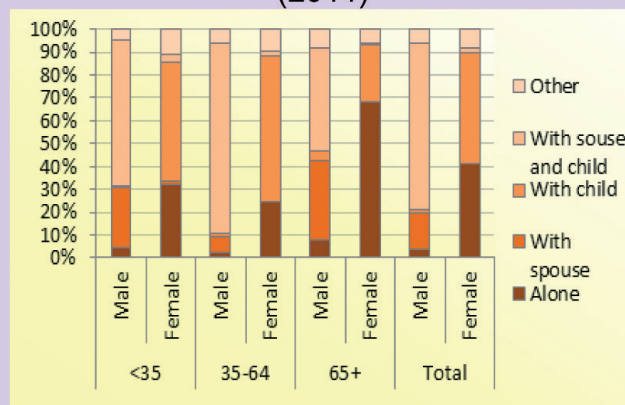
Living Arrangements:

Female-headed households are also different from male ones when it comes to living arrangements (the relationship of the head with the members of the household). Figure 2 shows that from among each 10 male heads of households, nine live with their spouse which is compatible with the marital status of this group (mostly with spouse). On the contrary, approximately half of female heads live with their children while some 40 percent live on their own. This pattern too is in congruence with the marital status of female heads (mostly spouseless).

From each 10 female heads of households in Iran, almost five live with their children and four live on their own.

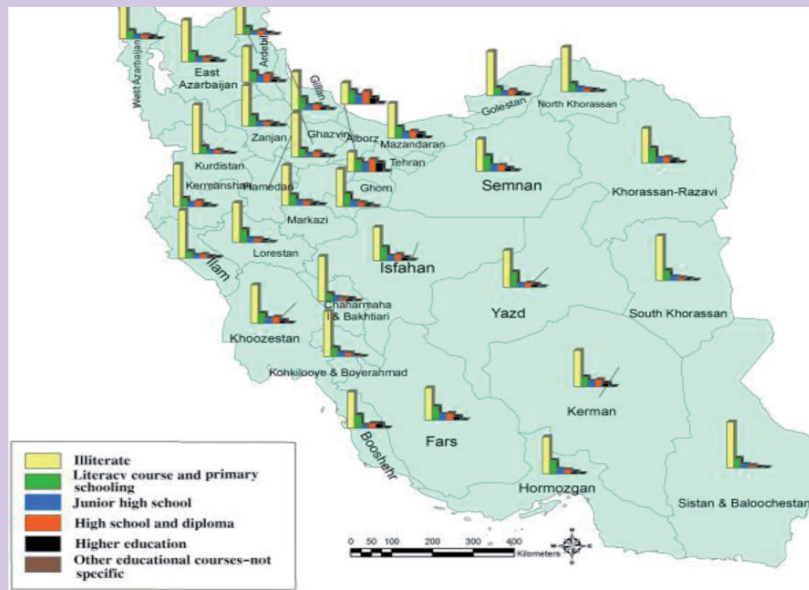
An analysis of the living arrangements based on the age pattern of female heads of households reveals that living alone is predominant among the elderly while living with children is common among the middle-aged. Such trends delineate the diversity of needs among female-headed households: the elderly who live on their own in the peak of their physical disability and middle-aged women who, without the help of a spouse, are the sole caretakers of their children. This is while men enjoy a higher chance of having the company of their spouses throughout the various stages of their lives. In terms of geographic distribution, the largest number of female heads of households living

Figure 2 – Heads of Households by Sex, Age Group, and Living Arrangements in Iran (2011)



Source: Ghazi-Tabatabaei and Torabi (2013, p. 25) excerpted from SCI (2011).

**Map1- Provincial
Distribution of Female Heads of Households
Based on Educational Degree
(Percentage) in Iran (2011)**



Source: Ghazi -Tabatabaei and Torabi (2013, p. 45) excerpted from SCI (2011).

on their own are in the Province of Yazd with the highest rate of elderly female heads (56.6 percent as opposed to only 4.2 percent in the Province of Markazi) while the Province of Kohkilooyeh and Boyerahmad hosts the highest percentage of female heads of households residing with their children (63.5 percent vis-à-vis 33.8 percent in the Province of Yazd).

Educational Status:

In 2011, 54.5 percent of female heads of households were illiterate while illiteracy rate stood at 16.1 percent for men. Furthermore, 40.3 percent of male heads of households enjoyed secondary or tertiary education while the same statistics for women was less than half of the aforesaid (17.8 percent). The low education level of female heads observed in all provinces (Map 1) could be attributed partially to the older age structure of female heads and the trend of educational improvement in the country; nevertheless, higher illiteracy and lower education levels among the children of female-headed households depicts the less favorable educational status of the members of these households. For female-headed households residing in rural areas and their

,children this educational status is least favorable, showing the diversity in the features and needs of these households.

Not only the heads but also the children of female-headed households have on average lower educational levels than those of male-headed households.

Health Status:

Regardless of the economic circumstances of households, the average health expenditure per capita among female-headed households is more than male-headed households. All in all, the average health expenditure of female-headed households residing in urban and rural areas is 1.7 and 1.3 times as much as that of male-headed households in urban and rural areas, respectively. Such a pattern can be indicative of the more inadequate health conditions of female-headed households and/or their lower access to health insurance services. Regardless, the problems related to health place more burden on these households. On the other hand, the share of health expenditure is higher among households with lower economic status such that this percentage

goes from 7.8 percent of the overall household expenses in the first income decile (the most disadvantaged female-headed households) to 4.5 percent of households of the last income decile (the most affluent ones). Here again, there are significant differences between the provinces: the highest ratio of health expenses to the overall expenses of female-headed households is in the urban areas of the Province of Fars (12.8 percent as opposed to only 2.0 percent in the urban areas of the Province of Alborz).

Economic Status:

In the Iranian society, men are the main breadwinners and in charge of the affairs outside the home while the responsibility of raising children and dealing with domestic chores falls on the shoulders of women. Under such circumstances, the rise in female-headed households can expose more women to masculine roles and duties and thereby place them in contexts where they face a great number of challenges.

The income of female-headed households and also their belonging to income deciles is lower than those of male-headed households.

The small share of women in the labor market is one clear sign of differentiating between gender roles in the country. This trend is still prevalent despite the improvement in women's educational levels in recent decades. While the rate of literacy of males and females aged six and above in 2011 stood at 88.4 and 81.0 percent, respectively, with almost half of each group holding secondary or higher education, the labor force participation of men aged 15 and above (70.8 percent) is approximately six times as much as that of women (12.4 percent) in Iran (SCI, 2012). Given the dominance of men in Iran's labor market, the rise in the number of female-headed households may lead to employment and income generation challenges for these women and also impose upon them the burden of fulfilling domestic and outside-home tasks.

Female-headed households occupy lower status compared to male-headed households in terms of their income and also their belonging to income deciles. More specifically, the

mean annual income for male-headed households in 2011 was IRR 99,335,846 which is 1.5 times as much as the figure for female-headed households (IRR 65,532,713). Besides, the percentage of the households belonging

The share of health expenditure among the most disadvantaged female-headed households is approximately two times as much as that of the most affluent of such households.

to the two lowest deciles (the most disadvantaged households) was also estimated to be over 2.5 times as much as that of male-headed households (43.3 percent as opposed to 16.8 percent).

The low economic level of female-headed households can be attributed to the low number of employments among the heads of these households in addition to their engagement in unstable and low-income jobs which women resort to mainly in middle age and even old age due to their financial needs. In fact, the low employment rates of heads of households marks one distinctive feature differentiating female- from male-headed households. In 2011, the ratio of female-headed households with unemployed heads (82.1 percent) was over three times as much as the figure for male-headed households (25.0 percent).

There is generally lower employment rates even among other members of female-headed households such that there are no employed individuals in 63.3 percent of these households while, with a 70-percent reduction, the same figure reaches 18.8 percent for male-headed households. As a result of this pattern, there are on average 3.7 unemployed persons for each employed individual in female-headed households while the same ratio is 2.6 in male-headed households. At the same time, the number of members of female-headed households is generally lower than that of their male counterparts. In 2011, the mean household size in the former and latter groups was 2.2 and 3.7 persons, respectively.

Furthermore, with the rise of deprivation among female-headed households, the number of unemployed individuals per each employed individual goes up too. With respect to the existing gender norms in the Iranian so-

ciety, such a trend can translate into female heads' simultaneously fulfilling family roles and securing livelihood which would be an extra burden on these women and the more disadvantaged ones in particular.

Based upon the information presented so far, the features of female-headed households can be summarized in five points:

1. Although the elderly comprise a noticeable share of female heads of households, the age diversity prevalent within this group signifies the diversity of needs and consequently the importance of programs to meet the specific needs of young, middle-aged, and elderly female heads of households.

2. The majority of female heads of households are spouseless, especially those who have lost their spouses due to their demise. It would be worthwhile to consider the effects of emotional, social and economic damages caused by the absence of a spouse or father in related plannings for female headed households.

3. Extensive illiteracy and low educational levels are commonplace among female heads of households; this is even reflected in the educational levels of the children of these households. Given the important role of education in raising general awareness and providing various socioeconomic opportunities, eliminating obstacles to educational growth – among the children of female-headed households in particular – may serve instrumental in improving the living conditions of these households.

4. Female-headed households are at lower economic levels yet spend a larger ratio of their income on health expenses compared to male-headed ones. Any initiative to improve the economic and health conditions of the members of female-headed households can prevent continuity and transmission of poverty between generations in these households.

5. Female-headed households do not have a uniform geographic distribution both in frequency and the aforementioned features. The significant differences existing between female-headed households residing in rural-urban areas and different provinces calls for regional programming to address the needs of these households.

Therefore, lack of attention to the diverse needs of the growing population of female-

headed households, over half of whom comprise children too, can bring about unfavorable outcomes for not only the current generation but also the ones to come.

The next section reviews and evaluated the background and existing policies regarding female-headed households in Iran. This section provides recommendations in order to enhance the status of these households.

Existing Policies

The attention placed by legislators and national authorities to the issues related to female-headed households is nothing new and dates back to around four decades ago. The most recent information available on the activities, services, and rules and regulations pertinent to female-headed households (Eftekhari et al., 2013) shows that from among a total of 75 legislations, rules and regulations, approvals, and directives related to female-headed households and households with no heads, 28 are directly pertinent to female heads of households. It is worthwhile to note that all these 28 cases have been approved after the Islamic Revolution, and Article 21 of the Constitution explicitly refers to the necessity of specific insurance for widows, elderly women, and women with no heads.

The legislation related to female-headed households is generally focused on direct support of these households within the framework of extending insurance, financial and in-kind assistance, and health services alongside empowerment of these households towards economic self-sufficiency through, for instance, social work services, training in various skills, and providing the grounds for employment and income generation. The most recent strategies on developing and managing economic and livelihood issues of these households have been prepared based upon two protection and empowerment policies (Presidential Center for Women and Families, 2013).

Lack of a harmonized terminologies and approach between various organizations in providing services, lack of a comprehensive databank on female headed households as well as existing legislative gaps are the main obstacles to a successful service provision to female headed households.

Although the proportion of disadvantaged female-headed households is considerable among such households, existing rules and plans for this group does not imply overlooking the diversity prevalent in households and the differences caused by their subsequent demographic, social, economic, and specific needs. Furthermore, vulnerability analysis of existing legislations, rules and regulations, and services (Eftekhari et al., 2013) demonstrate that many factors have caused the lack of success in the provision of services for alleviating deprivation among female-headed households. Some of these factors are:

- Although the majority of female-headed households who use various kinds of protection and empowerment services are covered by the Imam Khomeini Relief Fund or the State Welfare Organization, other governmental or nongovernmental bodies are also active in this area. Existing evidence indicates that these bodies do not even use a harmonized terminology regarding the necessary criteria for providing services to a female heading a household, a household having no caretaker, or having an illegible caretaker. Not using harmonized terminologies and approaches in providing services would lead to not only duplication and wasting of resources but would also prevent the provision of integrated services and comparability of the services rendered by various institutions.
- Absence of a comprehensive databank regarding female-headed households is also among the prominent impediments in the continuous monitoring of the features of heads of households and the members of female-headed households and particularly those in need. It is thus imperative to have such a databank especially with respect to the heterogeneity of features among such households as success in policymaking and planning necessitates a thorough understanding of the needs and competencies of target groups.
- The current gaps in legislation such as deficiencies in executive directives and also absence of a unified approach in the implementation of laws and supervision in their enforcement are among other parameters hindering success in provision of services.

Recommendations

Regarding the points raised in the previous section, the following recommendations can be useful to the comprehensiveness, efficiency,

and success of the services provided to female-headed households:

- Providing harmonized terminologies in order to identify female-headed households and rendering the required services for mental, social, economic, and health needs of this heterogeneous group of society.
 - Establishing a databank for heads and members of female-headed households based upon field studies and continuous research into the needs, characteristics, and competencies specific to this group.
 - Creating appropriate grounds to solve the problems of female-headed households by addressing the existing legislative gaps, increasing the number of women in policymaking and operational institutions, raising social awareness on the problems of these households and proposing solutions to overcome these problems, establishing and facilitating access to comprehensive counseling centers in order to deal with the issues of the heads and members of female-headed households, facilitating employment based on preserving human dignity while preserving the role of female heads of households both within family and in society, establishing trade information centers in order to provide updated information on investment and marketing opportunities, paving the grounds to utilize bank loans and special facilities, extending care services for the children, elderly, and disabled members of these households, and encouraging and supporting NGOs to provide services to female-headed households.
 - Establishing best practices by making good use of successful international experiences, governmental institutions, and local NGOs and also female-headed households who have overcome impediments.
 - Addressing the geographic differences within the features and needs of female-headed households through regional policymaking and designing indigenous plans.
- Developing a package of comprehensive policies relevant to female-headed households can serve useful in establishing harmonized terminologies to respond to the diverse needs of these households. At the moment, the Presidential Deputy for Women and Families is active in macro-policymaking for women in general and female heads of households in

particular. Considering the existing capacities, this Deputy could take charge of developing such policies by evaluating current policies and using expert opinion.

Developing comprehensive policies pertinent to female-headed households can create the necessary grounds for the integration of the definitions and procedures employed.

Meanwhile, with the upward trend of female-headed households and the diversity of governmental and nongovernmental institutions providing services to these social units, it is suggested that these institutions operate under the auspices of one central organization. Such an organization can fulfill an effective role in eliminating the existing implementation obstacles. To protecting female-headed households by facilitating interactions between governmental, non-governmental, local and international organizations, such an entity could also make best use of current capacities towards removing challenges facing female-headed households and towards empowerment of this group.

Institutions can operate under the auspices of one central organization. Such organization can play an effective role in eliminating the existing implementation obstacles.

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Internal Migration and Urbanization in Iran: Status quo, Challenges and Policy Guidelines

Hossein Mahmoudian*

Abstract

Over the past three decades, about one million people have annually moved within the borders of the country. Migration took place mainly from less developed to more developed regions. This has in turn led to an increase in the population of areas welcoming migrants, and a decrease in the population of the regions of origin. The ratio of urban-urban migration increased significantly, while rural-rural migration rates declined over the past few decades. Rural-urban migration also experienced a continuous decrease. Most of the migrants were in the 20-34 age range, i.e. the age of activity and employment, education, marriage, and military service. Furthermore, the sex ratio of migrants (particularly inter-provincial migrants) was higher than that of the total population. Female migrations were mostly due to women following their families. women's participation was lowest in urban-rural migration and highest in rural-urban migration. In 1956, less than one-third of the population consisted of urban dwellers, while in 2011, over 70% of the country's population resided in cities. The increase of urban population in recent years is mainly attributed to the overall population growth.

Socio-economic disparities, destruction of rural regions, environmental pollution in large cities, marginalized population, lack of proper welfare amenities for migrants in destinations, and vulnerability of those left behind in the rural regions, can be cited among the most important challenges of migration and urbanization. To control internal migration in the country, policies such as moving the population from densely populated regions, controlling the growth of major cities, developing secondary cities, as well as rural development have been implemented. The policy of developing secondary cities has had a greater success so far. Furthermore, other policy options have also been proposed, such as decreasing regional disparities by paying more attention to less developed rural regions, implementing employment generation programmes in both regions where send and receive migrants, increasing women's socio-economic participation to strengthen their role in migration, as well as offering the necessary support strategies for providing socio-economic security and welfare for vulnerable people in rural regions (in particular the elderly population) and urban regions (marginalized populations).

* Associate Professor in Demography, University of Tehran. hmahmoud@ut.ac.ir

1. Introduction

Migration causes changes in population structure and dynamics, leading to changes in the social, cultural, and economic conditions in both the regions of origin and destination of the migrants. Migration can be seen as a form of adaptation in response to economic and social needs. Nowadays, movements have become easier and are done in larger scales, and are mostly to gain access to welfare, better facilities and living conditions. The increasing number of studies related to migration were mostly a reaction to policy-makers and programmers' interest in population growth and urbanization.

Over the course of the past century, changes in mortality and fertility in Iran have played a decisive role in population changes. With improvement in the health conditions and therefore a relative control over mortality, fertility gained momentum in population growth. However, the fertility rates have also dropped below replacement level. Under such demographic conditions, it can be argued that internal migrations have been amongst the determining factors impacting population growth in the country at provincial levels as well as smaller divisions.

In Iran, like in most other countries, development has been the cause of rural-urban migration. Other factors intensifying the rural-urban trend of migration include the Land Reform Act of the 1960s, the rapid changes in urban society from the early 1970s onward, the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and the dominant approach to rural development (Vosoughi, 1987; Taleb and Anbari, 2005; Azkia and Ghaffari, 2004; Rostamalizadeh and Ghasemi-Ardehaee, 2012; Jomehpour, 1999). Among the outcomes of internal migration is the extension of urbanization.

Rural-urban migration brought about a myriad of changes in the conditions of rural and urban areas. The regions of origin, mostly small and disadvantaged, have lost much of their skilled workforce due to the absence of proper integration mechanisms. This in turn gradually led to the abandonment of rural areas. In addition, the daily increase in migrations caused irregularities in social and economic conditions, as well as the physical expansion of cities. The rise of poverty, inadequate access to housing and urban services, marginalized populations, insufficient transportation systems, and inefficient urban amenities are examples of problems caused by migration.

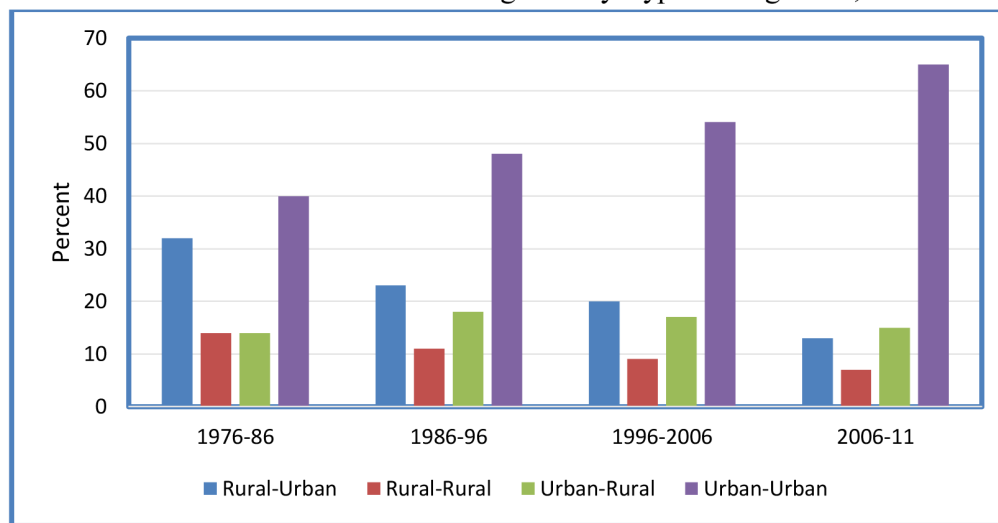
2. Internal Migration and Urbanization Conditions in Iran

2.1 Number of Migrants and Patterns of Migration during 1976-2011

From 1976 to 1986, around 5.7 million of the total population of the country was composed of migrants. During this period, due to the huge influx of Afghan citizens to Iran, the previous residence of a significant number of migrants (12.2 %) was reported to be "outside the country". In 1996, the share of the country's migrant population rose to 14.5% and gradually increased to reach 17.2% in 2006. This share decreased to 7.4% in 2011. A comparison of this five-year figure with that of the 1996-2006 period indicates that the percentage has dropped considerably in the last five years.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of internal migrants by the type of migration during 1976-2011. It can be observed that during this period, urban-urban migration experienced

a rapid increase, while rural-rural migration decreased. It is worthwhile to note the downward trend of rural-urban migration over the past 35 years. In particular, the 2011 Census shows that the percentage of urban-rural migration has been greater than that of rural-urban migration.

Figure 1: Relative Distribution of Internal Migrants by Type of Migration, Iran 1986-2011.

Source: 1986, 1996, 2006 and 2011 Censuses.

2.2. Migration Balance of Provinces

The trend and balance of inter-provincial migration during 1986-2011 indicates that the provinces of Tehran (including Alborz), Isfahan, and Khorasan Razavi received the highest share of migrants, while the provinces of Tehran, Khuzestan and Eastern Azerbaijan sent out the highest number of migrants during the same period. Considering the fact that these percentages are highly influenced by the provinces population size, the provinces of Ilam, Chaharmahal Bakhtiari and Kohkilooyeh and Boyerahmad have received the lowest number of migrants, while the provinces of Ilam, Kohkilooyeh and Boyerahmad, and Yazd (all among the provinces with small population size) have sent out the lowest number of migrants.

The provinces of Tehran and Isfahan have always had the highest positive net migration rates, while the highest negative net migration rates belonged to East Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, and Khuzestan. The Khuzestan province had the highest negative net migration (due to the war) during 1976-1986. However, in the following decade (1986-1996) this same province experienced a positive net migration. The province of Fars, which enjoyed the second highest positive net migration rate after Tehran province during 1976-1986, joined those provinces with higher negative net migration rates in the next three census periods.

In contrast, Gilan province, with a negative net migration during 1976-1996, had a considerable positive net migration in the past two censuses.

In the 2011 Census, Tehran province-with always the highest positive net migration-changed to a province that sends out migrants. The Alborz province, which was separated from Tehran province during the period between the past two censuses, took the place of Tehran province in the 2011 migration census. Therefore, the migration status of Tehran province in the past has been influenced by this now separated region.

In the 1996-2006 period, the highest annual positive net migration rates were in the provinces of Tehran, Yazd, and Qom while the highest annual negative net migration rates were reported in the provinces of Kermanshah, Hamedan, and Ardebil. In the 2006-2011 period, the provinces of Alborz, Semnan, and Bushehr had the highest positive net migration rates, while the provinces of Lorestan, Kermanshah, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari had the highest negative net migration.

The total migration rate illustrates the fact that in the 1996-2006, and 2006-2011 periods, the provinces of Alborz, Semnan, Qom, Markazi, and Bushehr were mostly impacted by inter-provincial migrations and the provinces of Ker

man, Fars, Sistan and Baluchistan, and West Azerbaijan were the least impacted. Between the two periods, there has been a reduction in the level of impact of inter-provincial migrations on provincial populations, and the highest change was reported in the north-western provinces of the country.

2.3. Migrants' Age and Sex composition

The percentage of young people in the migrants population is higher than that of the total country's population. In the 2006 census, about 38 percent of the migrant population were in the two age groups of 20-24, and 25-29; followed by the age groups of 15-19 and 30-34. These groups represent the ages of work and activity, education, marriage, and military service (for males). In the two censuses of 2006 and 2011, in all migrant age groups, the number of men was higher than women. The 2011 census shows that the sex ratio of the total population (101.8) had been lower than that of the total migrant population (110.7), and particularly that of inter-provincial migrant population (124.6). The highest difference is related to the 15-24 followed by 35-69 age groups. This illustrates the prominence of male presence in internal migration.

2.4. Causes of Internal Migration

The 2011 Census (Table 1) shows that 46 percent of migrants moved to follow their families (tied migrations).

The next common causes for migration in-

clude work, education, and military service. Excluding those "migrations to follow family" and "other factors", the share of "military service", and "access to better housing" lead to a higher percentage for urban-rural migrations than rural-urban ones; however, the share of the remaining factors is higher for migrations to urban regions. For the factors "education and graduation" and "migrations to follow family", female migrants have a higher share compared to men while male migrants have a greater share in other factors.

3. Urbanization

The first census conducted in Iran shows that less than one-third of the population (31.4 %) lived in urban areas. In 1981, urban and rural areas had an equal share of the population, with the urban population continuing to grow larger in the subsequent years. In 2011, over 70% of the country's population resided in urban regions. During the period 1956-2011, the urban population of Iran increased about 9 times.

The annual average growth rate of urban population in the period 1956-1976 stood at about 5 percent, with an increase of about 0.5 percent during 1976-1986. The sharp increase of total population during 1976-1986 led to accelerating the growth rate of the urban (and even rural) populations. However, the rate had a downward trend after that, falling to 2.1 percent in the 2006-2011 period.

Table 1. The Relative Distribution of Internal Migrants by Reason of Migration, Destination Place, and Sex, Iran 2011.

Sex/ Destination	Reason for migration									Total	Number
	Job	Better Job	Job transfer	Education/ Graduation	Military service	Better Housing	Tied Migration	Other	Not Declared		
Men	11.2	6.5	7.5	13.8	11.0	15.3	26.0	6.5	2.2	100	2908560
Women	1.5	0.8	1.2	14.2	0.0	5.4	68.6	5.9	2.4	100	2626106
Urban	6.6	3.9	5.1	15.4	4.1	10.1	46.0	6.6	2.2	100	4302086
Rural	6.7	3.6	2.4	8.9	11.9	12.3	46.8	5.1	2.4	100	1232580
Total	6.6	3.8	4.5	14.0	5.8	10.6	46.2	6.2	2.3	100	5534666

Source: Iran 2011 Census

The gap between the annual growth rate of urban and rural population is due to a number of factors. Considering the fact that the natural growth rate of population in urban areas is lower, rural-urban migration, transformation of villages into cities, and the inclusion of villages in cities are of crucial importance in this respect. Yet, their influence has not been the same during different periods. In the 1966-1976 period, a sizable number of rural inhabitants headed for cities, and this migration continued well into the following decade. As a result, up to the 1986 census, the rural-urban migration can be viewed as an influential factor accounting for the increase of urban population and decrease of rural population. With the fall of rural-urban migration, the share of other factors in the urban population growth increases. In the 1996-2006 period, the share of migration in population growth was only 15 percent, while the share of the natural growth of urban population, transformation of villages into cities, and inclusion of villages in cities stood at 58, 23, and 3 percent respectively (Kazemipour, 2012).

Iran's urban population was about 54 million in 2011 which grew by 11%, 46%, and 100% compared to 2006, 1996, and 1986. The highest increase was observed in the provinces of Bushehr, Hormozgan, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari; while the lowest is in Sistan and Baluchistan, Lorestan, and Hamadan. In the very first census in Iran, 201 cities were registered; the number of cities in 1976 stood at 373, in 1996 at 612, and in 2011 at 1139. In the 1956-2011 period, the number of cities grew over by 5.5 times. Of course, the percentage of the growth of urban areas has been different during different censuses, with the least being for the 1986-1996 period, while the highest marking the 1996-2006 period. The annual growth rate of the number of cities in Iran during 2006-2011 was approximately 2.4 percent. Some 31 percent of Iran's cities in 2006 had a population below 5,000; adding to this the number of cities with a population of 5,000 to 10,000, the percentage of cities with a population below 10,000 reaches 55 percent. These figures are 33, and 57, respectively in 2011 and 2013 (Mahmoudian and Ghasemi-Ardehaee).

4. Challenges Related to Migration and Urbanization

Studying the conditions of migration and urbanization in Iran indicates a multitude of issues and challenges. The in-migration of developed provinces and the out-migration of less developed ones clearly shows the economic and societal disparities of regions. The intensity and incessant flow of rural-urban migrations has also made the majority of rural areas prone to absolute destruction. Rural migration has also intensified underdevelopment through vacating the rural areas from the young population; most non-migrants (primarily women, and the elderly) residing in rural areas lack proper and sufficient economic and welfare amenities (Mahmoudian and Ghasemi-Ardehaee, 2013). Unleashed urban sprawl and inappropriate urbanization, particularly in megalopolises has brought about unfavourable repercussions (such as environmental degradation), and migrants (mostly peri-urban dwellers) suffer from lack of proper welfare amenities in the destination.

5. Migration and Urbanization Policies

Generally, the policies which influence the migration and redistribution of population can be categorized into two groups: direct policies which are designed openly to change the process of migration, and indirect policies with their impact on migration being secondary once the main goals of those policies were reached. Direct policies regulate the models of residence and replacement. This process comprises establishing barriers to the flows of migration to cities, travelling restrictions, and resettlement plans. Indirect policies usually target for the enhancement of the status quo in the region of origin or to create different habitats such as border areas or midway cities. The goal is to reduce the appeal of large cities in drawing large populations, by creating more attractive areas. Examples of indirect policies are providing general welfare services and facilities in rural areas, industrial and administrative decentralization, land reforms, rural development programs, supporting the price of agricultural produce to raise rural revenues, income policies to prevent the rise of urban wages, and extending education, as well other urban development policies with the

goal of helping migrants and enhancing living conditions in urban areas which also bear indirect effects on migration (Sanaei, 1996).

5.1. Migration Policies Implemented in the Country

Up to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, no direct policy on migration or specifically on rural-urban migration was implemented. Following the Revolution, specific rules and regulations were formulated and enforced for the housing and employment of people in Tehran and large cities. At that time, purchasing a residential unit, employment authorization, and even registration of children at school became possible through submitting a special Basij ID card (Zanjani, 2001: 208). This policy aimed to prevent the precarious expansion of Tehran and a number of the large cities. Since a large portion of the migrants inflow to megacities originated from rural areas, this policy can be considered as the first direct policy enforced in the context of rural-urban migration, in general, and migration from rural areas or other cities to Tehran in particular.

Designating a 120-kilometer zone around the periphery of Tehran as an industrial-free zone, played an indirect role in the decrease of the capital's population. This brought about new industrial townships and strengthened the existing low population cities beyond the zone (ibid). In 1990, Iran Supreme Council of Urban Development approved establishing six new cities (Hashtgerd, Parand, Pardis, Andisheh, Eshtehard, and Zavieh) by 2011, for the redistribution of the population in Tehran, and to control migration (Shahabian, 2004:81). An appropriate and regulated distribution of the population in Tehran through housing the surplus population of this megalopolis in the new cities was among the main goals of establishing these cities.

Another indirect policy of rural-urban migration control is the rural development programs. The starting point of these programs can be attributed to the Land Reform Act of 1963. After the Islamic Revolution, rural development plans were performed under the supervision of the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad. Providing insurance for rural inhabitants, optimizing and

renovating rural housings, as well as providing facilities and loans, are examples of the latest plans for rural development. In mid-2010, the MPs reviewed Article 174 of the Fifth National Development Plan Bill under the title of "Rural Development" and thus obliged the government to formulate policies related to incentives for reverse migration (urban-rural) and relative stabilization of the rural population until the end of the first year of the Plan. Some examples of these supports include improving rural development indices, providing modern services, and producing a program for prioritizing rural services with respect to regional and local circumstances.

5.2. Outcome of the Implemented Policies

The first direct migration policy in Iran was only enforced for a limited time. At the time, purchasing residential property in Tehran required a specific economic rationing ID card and so migrants to Tehran had to resort to residing in townships and villages on the outskirts of the capital. The result was the growth of those villages and townships –which were technically beyond the specific zone of Tehran and its exclusive restrictions – instead of the rise in the population of the city of Tehran. To this end, within the first five-year period (1976-1981) of the 1976-1986 decade, the share of migration in the rise of the population of the city of Tehran, increased compared to the previous 10 years. This share increased from 1.19 in 1976 to 2.24 percent in 1981. However, it acquired a negative trend from 1981 and, for the first time Tehran's population growth fell below its natural growth rate (Zanjani, 1989:26).

This policy resulted in sending out the migrants of Tehran to the surrounding cities which enjoyed an excessive population growth. Throughout the 1976-1986 period (when migration policies in Tehran were being implemented), cities such as Rajaeishahr, Mehrshahr, Gharchak, Islamshahr, and Robatkarim enjoyed an annual growth rate of 30.3, 30.18, 15.6, and 14.2 percent, respectively. Although this was indeed the goal behind the establishment of these cities, assessments revealed that migrants first entered these cities (townships) and subsequent to improvements

of their financial situation, and acquaintance with the urban and megalopolis environment, intended to migrate to Tehran.

Establishing new cities, to some extent, helped to direct the migrants to regions other than Tehran. Findings of Zebardast and Jahanshaloo (2007), indicate that half of the families residing in the new city of Hashtgerd are the surplus population of Tehran and Karaj. One of the important reasons of migration to the new city of Hashtgerd is the low price of housing. Regarding rural development, it must be pointed out that many of such plans have actually contributed to the migration of rural inhabitants. The Land Reform conducted in Iran – an example of rural development plans – expedited the industrialization and commercialization of agriculture and thus created rural workers who would earn daily wages. Major landowners expelled farmers and used daily workers at an extended rate. Thus, for most farmers, migration was the last choice.

5.3. Policy Options

Considering the mentioned condition of migration and urbanization in the country, and in lines with the articles no 9 and 10 of the Population Decree issued by His Eminence the Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran, the following policy options can be suggested:

- Diversifying the resources of data on migration through consolidating registration data and the periodical implementation of national surveys, for a more precise understanding of the causes of migration and migrants' situation.
- Paying further attention to less developed regions to reduce regional disparities.
- Implementing appropriate employment policies both in areas of origin (in order to reduce migrants outflow) and in destination areas (in order to ensure migrants' better adaptation with the destination).
- Increasing the socioeconomic participation of women to raise their awareness on their creative role in migration.
- Providing the necessary protection guidelines to ensure the socioeconomic and welfare security of vulnerable inhabitants of rural areas (the rural elderly in particular) and of urban areas (marginalized populations).

- Providing a more precise definition of urban and rural areas in the context of demographic, economic, social, and environmental criteria in order to expose the real differences between urban and rural areas.

5.4. Policy Recommendations

The studies conducted on the direct policies of rural-urban migration demonstrate that only a few countries including China and Poland have somehow managed to decrease rural-urban migration through imposing legal restrictions and issuing residence permits. In other countries such as Congo, Niger, Zaire (now the DRC) etc., these policies failed due to their weakness in enforcement. Difficulty of enforcing legal restrictions, ease of forging documents and the huge rate of fraud in work and residence permits, the easy return of those expelled through active migration network (friends, relatives, fellow citizens, etc.) are some examples of the challenges of controlling rural-urban migration (Wang, 1997; Liang, 2001; Wang and Huen, 1998; Obray, 1991).

Establishing schools in the rural areas of many countries prevents the youth from migration because of education, but imparts the students with the need to seek jobs in urban areas. Furthermore, building roads increases the contact between rural areas and remote regions, thereby facilitating migration. A research conducted in India illustrates that initiatives to develop the small-scale cottage industries in the rural areas may augment rural-urban migration, as these industries enhance the skills of rural inhabitants, giving them more acceptance in the urban labor market. Another research conducted in Malaysia too, indicates that regional and rural developments prompt stage-by-stage migration (i.e. from rural areas to small cities and subsequently to regional centers) and hence to hubs in cities (Obray, 1991: 142-143).

In view of the cases mentioned and the policy experiences of Iran during the past decades, the following principles can be taken into consideration for the formulation of rural-urban migration policies:

- Formulating policies for migration must be based on a proficient and efficient management system and expertise. In this regard, it is recommended to establish an institution to take charge of migration whose responsibilities will include collecting data and information, supporting research activities, and policy making on migration.
- Preventing any measure that detracts the principles of individual's free relocation in the process of selecting their habitat. Therefore, the direct policies of rural-urban migration must be flexible, adjustable and variable in accordance with the spatiotemporal context.
- Focusing on the typology, etiology, and eventualities of the outcomes of migration is crucial. Migration may be temporary, or permanent. The reason of migration for some may be finding jobs, education, etc., while others may migrate simply to follow their families. These various kinds of migration will definitely have different outcomes. It is recommended to formulate different policies for different kinds of migrations with different reasons.
- Policies for migration must be integrated with other policies. For example, in the early years of the Islamic Revolution, the direct and indirect policies adopted sought to decrease the migration of rural dwellers to cities, while, on the other hand, giving various special benefits and privileges to urban dwellers encouraged this kind of migration.
- The trend of population changes in capital cities and megacities indicate that although enforcing certain policies may decrease migration, it cannot prevent or stop it. Therefore, in terms of the overall goals of development, policy guidelines must be geared to help migrant families to adjust and adapt themselves to life in megacities. Meanwhile, organizing and empowerment of marginalized populations, in order to achieve sustainable development, must not be overlooked.
- Attending to social and environmental perspectives in development planning is essential. The study conducted by Ghasemi-Ardehaee and Rostamalizadeh (2012), on the "Impact of Rural Housing Loans in Changing Rural Life" depicts that in providing rural housing, mainly the quantitative nature and ideally resilience against natural disasters have been highlighted, and little attention is paid

to the principles and criteria of rural housing plan (rural architecture, culture, lifestyle, and means of livelihood), and its quality. As a result, the policy which was propelled towards rural development may actually lead to rural underdevelopment.

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