

# **Developmental Idealism and Ideational Force of Family Change in Yazd, Iran**

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### **Extended Abstract**

This paper adopted Arland Thornton's theory of developmental idealism (2001; 2005) to examine dissemination of developmental ideas in Iran and the extent to which ordinary people are familiar with and use these ideas in evaluating attitudes, values and behaviors related to the family. Ever since the spread of Islam in Iran, the Islamic value system has had a strong and persistent effect on all spheres of life and has acted as a homogenous force for family values and behaviors throughout the society. In spite of the enduring and influential role of past religious-cultural elements on family attitudes and behavior, some dimensions of Iranian family have experienced rapid changes during the last century. For instance, according to census data taken between 1966 and 2006, female singulate mean age at marriage increased from 18.4 to 23.3 and the proportion of women never married by age 15-19 increased from 53 to 82 percent (Statistical Centre of Iran 1998, 2006). This rise in the age of marriage has been accompanied by more involvement of women in process of decision makings about the timing of marriage and mate selection. The proportion of women who participated in the choice of their spouse rose from 18 percent to 54 percent between marriage cohort of the 1960-64 and 1995-2000 (Askari-Nodoushan et al. 2006). Also, Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has decreased from 7.7 in 1966 to 2.17 in 2000 (Aghajanian & Mehryar 1999; Abbasi-Shavazi & McDonald 2006) and family size has been shrinking. Further, contraceptive use has increased from 14 percent in 1974 to 72 percent in 2000 (Zatuchni 1975; Mehryar et al 2001).

During the last century, modifications of family aspects have been associated with a series of rapid changes in the socio-economic and political structure of Iranian society. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Iran has witnessed a continuous growth in urbanization, increasing level of mass education, expansion of communication, rapid modernization of economic sectors and the expansion of appropriate infrastructures for development of urban and rural areas. Moreover, Iran has experienced such unique social and political events as a long war with Iraq, economic boom in 1970s thanks to the oil revenues followed by economic depression and inflation in 1980s (Zangeneh 2004), incidence of two revolutions- Constitutional Revolution and Islamic Revolution- in less than one century and its consequential socio-political changes. Given the distinct context, we believe that Iran would be an excellent case for the study of developmental idealism and family change.

The findings presented in this paper are the results of a survey carried out between November and December 2007 in the city of Yazd, a religious - conservative city in the

central part of Iran. Target population for the study was women of all marital status aged 15-54 years old in Yazd. Sampling frame was drawn using the two-stage stratified cluster sampling technique by the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI). A total sample size of 564 households was obtained from 47 selected clusters, each consisting of 12 households. Around 550 ever-married women aged 15-54 and a total of 155 never-married women aged 15-29 women were interviewed.

Results indicate that respondents have an incredible amount of information and knowledge about existing differences in various social, economic and familial characteristics of developed and not developed societies. For the most cases, answers provided by respondents are in the same directions as anticipated by contemporary developmental models. In addition, they believed in causal reciprocal relationships between development and change in family dimensions, with family change cause development and development cause changes in family. Altogether, the findings suggest that developmental models widely disseminated in Yazd and had a strong influence on the beliefs and thinking of respondents. Following are few tables summarizing the results.

**Table 1- Some aspects of family change in Iran**

	<b>1966</b>	<b>2006</b>
Proportion of never married women aged 15-19	53.0	82.0
Female mean age at marriage	18.4	23.3
Male mean age at marriage	25.0	26.2
TFR	7.7	1.9
Household size	5.4	4.0
Proportion of literate women 6+	17.9	75.9

Figure 1.

Comparing UN HDI and respondents mean score on development

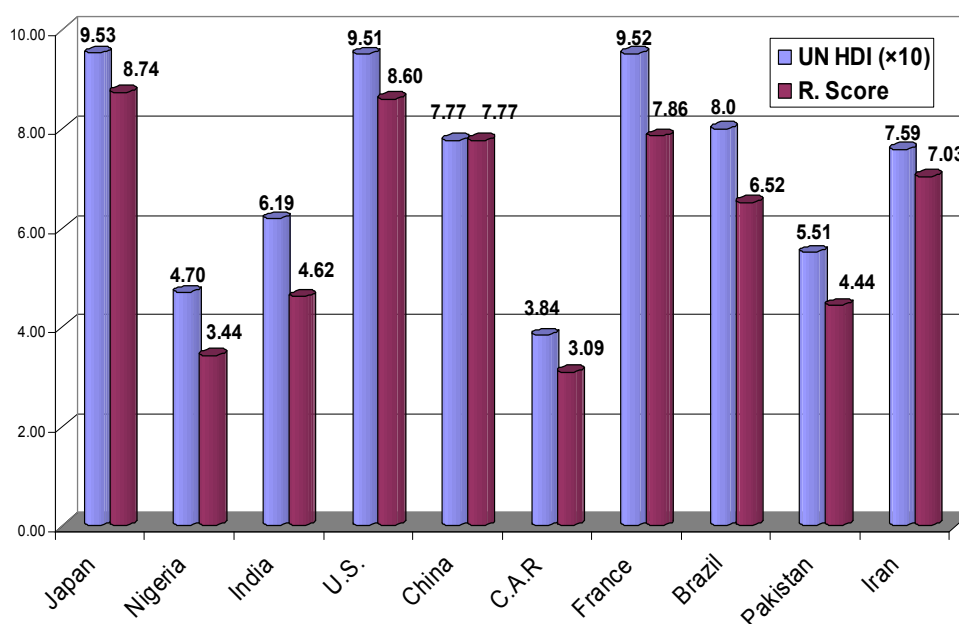


Table 2- Distribution of women responding to the question whether the following items are more common in Developed or Not Developed places?

	Not Developed	Developed	About the Same
Married children living with their parents or in-laws	80.8	6.0	12.8
Females marrying before the age of eighteen	81.9	7.1	10.8
Family unity and loyalty	40.4	43.8	15.4
Arranged marriage	86.3	9.0	4.7
Couples having many children	95.0	1.8	3.0
Divorce and marriages breaking up	38.1	47.2	14.5
Equality between women and men	12.1	73.1	14.5

**Table 3- Evaluation of causal effect of socio-economic development on family change**

*(over time, will a successful implementation of a development program increase or decrease the following things:)*

	Increase	Decrease	About the Same
Married children living with their parents or in-laws	12.2	<b>79.9</b>	7.8
Females marrying before the age of eighteen	16.1	<b>78.8</b>	5.1
Equality between women and men	<b>74.5</b>	11.7	13.8
Family unity and loyalty	<b>58.3</b>	29.2	12.2
Marriages breaking up	<b>39.7</b>	52.9	7.0
Arranged marriages	13.7	<b>80.9</b>	5.3
Couples having many children	8.0	<b>89.9</b>	2.1

**Table 4- Evaluation of the effect of family change on socio-economic development**

*(over time, will a successful implementation of a smaller-family-size /an older-age-at-marriage program increase or decrease following things:)*

	Reduce Family Size			Increasing Age at 1 <sup>st</sup> Marriage		
	Increase	Decrease	About the Same	Increase	Decrease	About the Same
The overall standard of living?	94.5	3.3	2.3	74.8	12.9	12.2
The fraction of children dying before their first birthday	5.1	82.9	5.5	9.2	81.8	9.0
Being educated	94.5	2.1	3.4	92.5	3.6	4.0
The income difference between rich and poor people	34.1	50.4	15.5	31.9	35.1	32.9
The fraction of people working on farms	20.6	53.1	26.3	15.9	49.2	34.7

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